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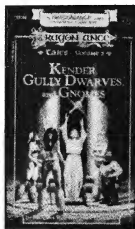
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Reflections

Robert Silverberg

Some further words on genetic engineering —

Regular readers of this column will be aware that I've devoted considerable space to an examination of the widespread public uneasiness over all manner of gene-splicing experiments, including some that even the dedicated enemies of such research privately admit are harmless. (Which doesn't stop them from going into court to block tests of them, nor from encouraging vandalism of experimental sites.) I have argued that genetic research of this kind, while of course holding the potential for danger if misapplied or improperly conducted, is perhaps our best available route for dealing with such problems as famine, disease, and hereditary physical defects; and that much of the opposition to it comes from those who have allowed themselves to be stampeded into a panic response to all scientific research, be it designed to produce spaceships, cures for cancer, or bigger nuclear bombs.

From reader Leslie Fish of El Cerrito, California — a town near San Francisco, where much of this campaigning against science originates — comes a lengthy letter discussing my column on the Frostban bacterium that apparently enables agricultural crops to put up greater resistance to killing frosts. This microorganism finally was allowed a field test in 1987, after several years of legal delays, and no harmful results have yet been detected from its exposure in the Northern California atmosphere.

Ms. Fish notes that the recent tests, despite elaborate security precautions, still failed to come up to her ideal safety standards: "Sure, the field was enclosed by berms and ditches and air-monitoring towers — but it was still open to the air. *Pseudomonas* [the frost-fighting bacterium] has been known to hitch rides on dust motes and travel a good long way on a favorable wind. What use would those air-monitors be in such a case, except to note that the beastie was, indeed, escaping?"

"Second, even supposedly harmless bacteria and viri [sic] have been known to mutate into dangerous forms, and there's good reasons to believe that gene-splicing tends, by weakening intergenetic bonds, to encourage further mutation. Besides, not all members of the *Pseudomonas* family are harmless; some of them cause nasty infections in human beings. It isn't wise to give *Pseudomonas syringae* any encouragement to imitate the black sheep of the family.

"Third, the whole program was wastefully unnecessary. Its basic premise (The Screwfly Solution!) of having the non-iceforming bacteria replace the natural iceforming variety is a gamble at best. Why *should* the laboratory-bred beastie displace its wild cousin? The wild *Pseudo. s.*, having evolved in the natural environment, is thoroughly adapted to survival therein; the laboratory-bred *Pseudo.* may very well not be. If the lab-bred beastie is, in fact, 'more rigorous' than its wild cousin, then there's reason to worry

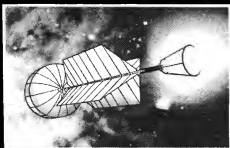
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about its future spread, mutation, adaptability, and possible danger. You can't have it both ways. Besides, there already exists several topical *Pseudocides* on the market; it wasn't necessary to create a new bug to push out the old one. The risks and the costs of this little experiment totally outweigh the possible benefits."

These are not foolish arguments, nor are they foolishly set forth. Even so, what they come down to, it seems to me, is a combination of reactionary attitudes toward progress and out-and-out panic over scientific research. Ms. Fish fears mutant bacteria more than she fears a killing frost. (Farmers might take the opposing position.) True enough, not all agricultural aids have been ultimately beneficial: consider the havoc that the insecticide DDT worked on the environment before it was suppressed. But must we shut down the gene labs because there is the *chance* that a harmless bacterium will mutate into a dangerous one? Must we get along with current frost-protection techniques (smudge pots, etc.) because there's the *risk* that this new one may develop into some lethal menace? How big a risk is there, anyway? And what is the risk of never taking risks?

Ms. Fish's underlying position is revealed a little later in her letter:

"But beyond the Frostban caper itself, why should you assume that all opposition to any new scientific development is no more than superstitious hysteria? God knows, modern science has given us several hellish inventions to fear! I'm not just talking about The Bomb, or even other vicious weapons that tunnel-visioned scientists have duly created and obediently handed over to assorted generals. Consider also the unlovely developments in germ warfare, spy devices, privacy-

invading electronics techniques, new methods of torture and mind-control, exotic new poisons, the joys of toxic waste, iatrogenic diseases and high-tech crime."

Against the *reductio ad absurdum* the gods themselves contend in vain. Yes, Ms. Fish, science has given us all those dreadful things. But also we have been provided with the polio and smallpox vaccines, safe and easy travel to other continents (and other planets!), open-heart surgery, flashlights, anesthesia, oxygen tents for premature babies, and several other such things that all but the most confirmed anti-modernist is likely to agree have improved the quality of life. "So long as scientists continue to whore for governments and big business (two groups notorious for valuing money and power far more than the well-being of citizens) they will be feared and hated along with their masters," Ms. Fish declares. It's a familiar argument, even a stale one: to me it sounds like radical rhetoric out of the 1930s.

Fortunately for our future, most people disagree with the sort of arguments Ms. Fish presents. A nationwide poll taken in the fall of 1986 by Lou Harris & Associates found that "as in other areas of science and technology, people favor the continued development and application of biotechnology and genetic engineering. Obstruction of technological development is not a popular cause in the United States in the mid-1980s." The survey showed that two thirds of those questioned believed that genetic engineering would improve the quality of life, and would approve testing genetically engineered organisms in their own communities. 58% favored wide-scale use of genetically altered microbes. 80% said it was not morally wrong to change the genetic makeup

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of human cells to cure hereditary diseases. (But more than half disappointed of using genetic engineering for cosmetic changes such as altering eye or skin color, or to improve human intelligence.)

All the same, I think such critics of gene-splicing research as Leslie Fish and Jeremy Rifkin are valuable and even necessary. Optimistic though I am about the future of this work, I'm not so naive as to be unaware of the risks. (Nor are the people polled by Lou Harris: a majority felt that it was likely that genetically engineered products would someday cause serious danger to people or the environment. Nevertheless, they are willing to take the risk for the sake of the benefits that may be gained.) We are venturing into unknown territory, and the debate over aims and methods is a useful dialectical process that will curb excess, reduce risk, and hold in check just the sort of scientific arrogance that Ms. Fish perhaps too keenly fears (but which certainly exists). Nothing will halt genetic research now: the genie, Ms. Fish, is out of the jar to stay. But people like you, much as I disagree with you, are helping to see to it that we keep our wits about us as we ask that potent but unpredictable genie to work his miracles on our behalf. ●

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Please note that our pamphlet "Constructing Scientification & Fantasy" has been discontinued and is no longer available.



THE GOLDSMITH'S MAID
by Sandra Miesel
art: John Lakey



The author informs us that she is still pursuing her doctorate in medieval history at Indiana University, where she is struggling to re-learn Latin. When not declining nouns or conjugating verbs, she is busy writing science-fiction and fantasy tales. Her previous appearance in Amazing® Stories was with "The Sword That Wept" (September 1987).

Eternity had in no wise lessened the Saint's love for the art he had practiced in time. He now shaped destinies across all worlds as deftly as he once worked gold on one. For however much his heavenly workshop transcended his earthly establishment, a real workshop it was nonetheless.

Thus when the mirror in which he was wont to contemplate his handiwork showed tarnish spreading across a place that had hitherto seemed bright metal, quick sympathy flared up in him. He resolved to purge away the sinful dross that fed corrosion's stain.

To this end, he withdrew from his vast stock the minute but precious images of a man, a woman, and a child. The three were so well matched, they might have passed for a family, although they were not truly kin. The artfully wrought figures looked almost alive by the blood-red coals kindled beneath the smelting crucible. But inspection of these sacrificial offerings revealed that the man was partly flawed and would profit most from the recasting. So the Saint put him to the fire first, saying: "Go forth with my blessing and remember not whence you came until I give you leave."

Molten gold flowed over his eyelids. He struggled to open them, but the pain of the shifting brightness pinched them shut again. He finally forced himself to look squarely at the light. The shimmering stilled. It was merely a sunbeam, not the dread radiance of Judgment Day. He allowed himself a trifling flicker of regret, for he was confident that his rise to heavenly glory was as obvious and inevitable as his rise to eminence in his art. Living through a plague was the sort of good fortune he had come to expect as his due.

But turning over was agony. The hammer-shaped golden amulet that was his guild emblem scraped his bare chest. He fumbled for the dear familiar charm, drew it up to his cracked lips, and kissed it. He was awake enough now to notice the stench and crusted mess of his befouled bed. Where was Brother Infirmarian? His cries brought no response. Easing himself upright, he spied a jug left on the bench beside the bed. He nearly tipped it over in his eagerness to grasp it. Then he drank, too thirsty to mind the staleness of the water. Again he called, but none came in answer.

His raised position let him gaze around the room. All the other beds were empty save the one next to his which held a dead monk. The aged brother lay there with the dust of the fields still on him, his grimy hands gone soft as

modeling wax. When had the infirmarian last made his rounds? He called one final time, more in anger than in hope. Neglecting their own sick was sheer disgrace, but *him*? Even on pilgrimage, the Archon of the Blest Company of Goldsmiths was jealous of his rank.

His wrath gave him the strength to crawl out of bed. He held on to a window ledge and peered out at the sunny kitchen garden. At its center, apples lay ungathered under their tree. A pair of doves flapped down upon the flagstone path and startled a passing butterfly. No other sound reached his ears save the buzzing of insects. The monastery was uncannily quiet.

Had all within it fled? Pilgrims and his own worthless servants might turn tail, but every monk as well? He had to know. Wrapping himself in a coverlet stripped from an unused bed, he staggered out of the infirmary. Working his way from pillar to pillar for support, he made slow, dizzy progress down the short cloister walk. He was near to fainting by the time he reached the kitchen. There, a clutter of greasy pots and cooking implements bespoke hasty departure. Jam had been spilled and tracked across the pavement. A drowned mouse floated in a pail of sour milk beside the open buttery door. The slops of the monks' last meal stank.

Heedless of the mess, he feasted on a slab of vermin-gnawed bread sopped in wine, that sweet, dark kind the mountain folk called "virgin's blood." He had drunk the same vintage from a lovely Syrian-made goblet while dining at the abbot's high table the day before the pestilence struck. The wine made his limbs heavy. He stretched out on the sun-warmed stone floor to rest. Afterward, he washed himself scrupulously clean at the lavabo before resuming his search of the buildings.

His clothing and his other belongings were gone from the empty guest-house, but he found a habit in the prior's quarters that fit him. In the monks' dormitory he also found the remains of Brother Infirmarian — he had not deserted his bedridden charges after all.

Enshrouding and burying the rank corpses of the two monks consumed most of the following day. In his weakened condition he could not have performed this service except that earth had already been turned in the cemetery to make a new mass grave. He shoveled the latest plague victims in with their brethren and wondered how many others had perished here. One recital of the *De profundis* would do for the lot.

Thus, the goldsmith was left the only man alive within the monastery walls, and there he was doomed to stay. The fleeing monks had apparently driven off all their stock. Returning home to Praha alone and afoot this late in the season was unthinkable. And even if he won through, what desolation might await him there? Surely, Death now stalked those streets as it had these cloisters. Better to remain where he was, recover his health, and hope for rescue. He had food and fuel aplenty since the community had already laid in provisions against the coming of winter.

For the next few weeks he did little but eat and sleep. At first he subsisted

on cold rations — cheese, fruit, and circles of hard bread that had been strung like flat beads on poles across the ceiling. Later, he turned his hand to pan and roasting spit. Though cookery, like smithcraft, had its inner mysteries, he unraveled enough of them to keep himself fed on dull but nourishing fare. Vigor slowly returned. Loose skin filled out. His red-gold curls showed more gray now than formerly, yet his lean body still held more strength in his middle years than many lesser men's did in their youth.

The goldsmith made himself master of his circumstances. He took the abbot's snug chambers for his own, since these afforded greater comfort than the guesthouse. He drew up inventories of whatever might prove useful or amusing during his enforced residence. One solace would be the monastic library. He expected to pass many agreeable hours perusing its riches, especially the rare volumes of lore concerning precious metals for which it was renown. There was even one flaked and wrinkled page of smelting recipes written by the sainted Patron himself which was enshrined in a book-shaped reliquary. However, its spiky, elongated script defied decipherment. When reading palled, he could fire up the monastery's forge and turn his hand to a bit of work. At the moment, he was loath to do much beyond savoring his survival.

He paced the grounds until he knew them as well as his own house on Chrysos Way. The monastery was splendidly situated atop a spur of the Sudetes foothills like a fortress of the spirit. Stoutly buttressed garden terraces thrust out along the southern edge of the crag extended its usable area, but the complex had long since expanded to its limit. Despite rebuilding over the centuries, it kept the traditional plan of church, living quarters, storerooms, and workshops ranged around the main cloister square.

For more than six hundred years the fame of its holy Founder had made the site an object of pilgrimage. All Christendom treasured the leaden badge of the blessed hammer. Dynasties rose and fell, but pilgrims from as far away as Iberia, the Exarchate, and the newly converted lands by the Baltic coast still toiled up the single road and through the fortified gate which had, in its time, withstood armed attack. The shrine of the Goldsmith-Saint glittered with their lavish offerings, the brightest among these being the fabulous golden altar given by Emperor Niketas Peisithanatos in expiation of his sin. Yet even in such proud company, the newly made crosier he had come here to deliver would shine. And once the pestilence abated, more commissions were bound to follow. Surely, the Lord Abbot would also want a bejeweled sacrament-house according to the latest fashion.

When he was not studying the masterpieces of past generations or reading or attending to domestic needs, he would stroll along the terraces or climb the bell tower. From that eyrie, he could survey the valley below, where cliffs and pastures gave way to fields and granges. As followers of the Lorcian Reform, the monks tilled their land themselves and with their own hands mined the valuable seams of coal that lay beneath it. But the pits were now

as empty as the furrows. Nothing moved on the pilgrim road or on the distant river. Neither was there any trace of fire.

The days grew shorter and colder. The goldsmith began to wonder if he were the only living man left in the kingdom but banished the thought as madness. Even the direst calamities left some survivors — unless Nature's law had been recast.

On some gray mornings he rang the church bells simply to hear their sound. He coaxed doves close with offerings of crumbs and spoke to them as if they were human. Nevertheless, he did not wholly abandon hope of rescue until the first blizzard struck, sealing him into his refuge until spring.

He endured the white rage of it well enough by day, but when night fell, he could not sleep. The warmth and softness of his bed brought no rest while the wind outside screamed like an army of souls in torment. The ghosts of those the plague had slain cried to him for succor and he had naught to give them. Though fear was not an emotion he cared to acknowledge often, he refused to be deprived of his rest. So he lit a lamp and dragged his bedding down to the church crypt, where the noise of the storm would be muted. There, he lay down alongside the Patron's wonder-working tomb. Let the Saint intercede for the wailing dead — if he had nothing else better to do.

The lamp flickered in a draught. For a moment he fancied that the chapel's squat columns swayed. Would the barrel vault overhead come crashing down upon him if he closed his eyes? He blew out the light defiantly, then slept and dreamt.

It might have been any master goldsmith's shop in Praha, even his own. The Saint sat at his workbench, calmly hammering out a golden horseshoe. An awning-shaded counter in front of the bench was spread with an array of ornaments offered for sale. Customers could study the effect of their selections in a small circular mirror propped up beside the display.

The Saint looked up from his work and spoke directly to him: "Be greeted, my guild-brother. I bring you tidings of sorrow balanced with hope. As you suspect, none save you still live within the borders of your land. Curb your pride and give thanks that my favor won this grace for you. You were not spared for the sake of what you are but rather for what you may become.

"The plague that slew your people was no commonplace sickness. It was a work of most foul magic, spread from those uncharted plains where heathen wizards conjure with the bones of horses on the barrows of accursed kings. He who cast the pest-spell has already paid for this deed with his wretched life. Hell now holds him fast.

"Nevertheless, by God's mercy, what his art wrought, yours can yet undo. Does not Holy Scripture say of souls in triumph:

As gold in the furnace He has tried them;

As a holocaust He has received them.

Therefore, let Beauty born of fire and blood contend with Death. Ponder well my message, brother. Revive your spell-slain people, and purge your soul from dross. Take up the commission that is offered you."

The Saint glanced at his stock of golden trinkets and smiled. His forefinger gently touched the mane of one tiny, perfect horse. The beast's reflection in the mirror galloped alive and free across a flowery meadow that rolled to the edge of the earth.

The goldsmith awoke with a start, as if someone had stroked his head. A feeble patch of light showed on the stairs. It was dawn and the wind lay still once more. He winced as he turned to rise, for his right hand smarted. Lightly burned into his palm was the imprint of a horseshoe, smaller than a finger ring.

Thus he never doubted for an instant that his dream was heaven-sent, for he saw it as the obvious culmination of an illustrious life. If kings, bishops, and aye, the Patriarch of Rome sought his services, why not Almighty God? What goldsmith born ever held such a commission? (If the Patron had, holy modesty had forbidden him to speak of it.) No fee had been mentioned, nor would any be asked. The honor of the thing was enough.

But what exactly had he been directed to do? He puzzled over the matter for days, scarcely pausing to eat or rest. The scent of challenge put him on his mettle, like a stallion approaching battlefield or Hippodrome. That simile itself opened the way to understanding: the golden horse that sprang to life held the key. Was he to re-people his homeland by making images of the dead? But countless thousands had perished. Who could memorialize each individually? Suppose instead he made *exempla* of every age, profession, and estate? He already saw them in his mind's eye: a miniature golden nation, no member bigger than a fingertip, yet complete to the last sword and soup bowl.

And once he had formed them, what then? Would the Hand of God, invisible and omnipotent, descend to quicken each one with Its touch? All would be revealed in due course. For the nonce, his task was to produce seemly images.

Evidently, the goldsmithy had stood idle for some years. Tools were misplaced. Wax was not to be found. The clay needed for investing models had gotten damp and then dried in a hard lump. He smashed the clod and laboriously ground it back to usable powder. Improvisation made him feel like an apprentice again. He reflected on the contribution underlings had made to the smooth ordering of his life. Once his scheme succeeded, their ministrations would be his to enjoy once more.

Unlike his own establishment in Praha, this smithy was bitterly cold. Since he felt no inclination to make his work an exercise in mortification, he used the monastery's amply supply of coal to alleviate the hardship. He kept a fire going constantly in the furnace, brought in braziers, and lined the

trench under the worktable with bricks that could be heated to keep his feet warm. These coal fires stank and fumed more than the charcoal ones he customarily used, but at least the threat of chilblains receded.

Coins from a store of pilgrim offerings that the fleeing monks had overlooked gave him enough gold to start with, once they had been refined. He would sculpt his candle-wax models over clay cores to save metal. After a slight initial hesitance and a few false strokes, he gave himself over to the joy of creation. He had been away from his bench far too long.

A royal effigy seemed the most fitting inauguration for the venture. He strove to capture the well-remembered majesty of his king with minute exactness. He covered the finished figure with coat after coat of clay mingled with dung. After thorough drying, he fired it to a red-hot glow, then poured out the wax to make room for the molten gold. Once the cast was completely cool, he broke the mold and removed the core.

The failure thus disclosed stunned the goldsmith. The king's body was pitted with leperous imperfections no amount of polishing could remove. The work was unworthy of a raw apprentice. Refusing to make excuses for himself, he consigned the image to the crucible and purified the metal once more.

He reviewed the procedure with a critical eye but also sought to turn his luck. Perhaps he had erred in attempting too noble a subject the first time. Since the highest does not stand without the lowest, he sought a humbler category of man to reproduce. His choice fell upon the aged lay brother who had died beside him in the infirmary. He devoted even greater care to this casting than to the previous one. Shyly reviving a half-forgotten custom of his art, he pricked his finger and let a drop of blood fall into the crucible before pouring its contents into the mold.

A perfectly cast figure rewarded his efforts. Once cleansed and polished, the brother stood as he might have in life, with his spade poised for spring planting. The goldsmith caressed his handiwork with mingled pleasure and reverence. Quite unthinkingly, he breathed a prayer for the soul of the man he had copied.

And so the work progressed at a deliberate pace throughout the winter. During the worst weather he kept to his bed, muffled away from the howling wind under thick layers of covers. On mild days he fashioned ecclesiastics, starting with the brethren of what he was coming to regard as "his" monastery. He went on to depict members of other popular orders — Thomasines, Basilids, and even some outlandish Trousered Friars from Scandia. His plan was to encompass all clerical ranks up to the primate himself.

After using all the available gold coins, he melted down pieces of secular jewelry that had been dedicated as votive offerings but never recast as sacred vessels for want of a goldsmith on the premises. By spring, this supply of metal was also exhausted. With some reluctance he turned to the church

plate. Kings had been known to expropriate such in times of grave need, so why should he not do likewise when the kingdom's very existence was at stake? The first piece he chose to sacrifice was a battered chalice. It must have been a fine piece in its day. The maker's mark was effaced, but the design of its filigreed embellishment suggested great age. Nevertheless, he dug out its remaining gems and put it to the fire without regret.

One morning when the grass grew green again, he ventured down to the valley. Emerging from the monastery walls lightened his heart more than he would have looked for. Birds were on the wing, and fruit trees had begun to bloom. The air was warm enough to carry the scents of new life. He smiled, recalling the proverb, "Morn carries gold in its mouth," and wondered if some miracle would let him melt young sunbeams into gleaming metal.

He banished this fancy and turned his attention to inspecting the nearest grange of buildings for whatever useful goods they might contain. He noted the location of beehives in case he should run short of wax. In the main barn a few chickens pecked at torn grain sacks, but he spied no larger beasts. If any had survived the winter, they must have wandered off. He could search the farther meadows and wooded hillsides, but what could he do with a cow or sheep except eat it — assuming he could contrive to butcher it? He sought no extra burdens.

He picked his way carefully around coal pits on his way to the river. Enough of the fuel had been mined and conveniently heaped up that he would not have to dig next winter's supply himself. But he shuddered at the prospect of carrying it up to the monastery on his back. Perhaps he did need a horse after all. If one could be found alive, it might be worth its keep.

He was hoping to find a new source of clay along the riverbank. Later, when the spring freshet was over, he might be able to fish here and vary his present diet of cheese and smoked meat. Angling was said to be pleasurable as well.

He swung around a clump of overhanging willows to find a woman and a half-grown child squatting on the ground skinning rabbits. Discovering two dragons could not have shocked him more. Springing to their feet, the strangers raised their bloody knives and motioned him back against a tree trunk. Clearly, any man, even a man in a monk's habit, was their enemy until proven otherwise.

"*Pax vobiscum!*" He cried, holding up his empty hands. Any Christian folk should know that gesture.

"What's peace, monk?" Bitterness clove through the woman's Moravaskan accent like a blade. "'Cheap to cry, dear to buy.'"

The weapon looked at home in her hand. He explained himself in low, soft tones such as a rider might use on a fractious steed.

"I am no monk despite this garb. While guesting here, my honest business with the abbot was cut short by an outbreak of plague. I alone survived. If I wished to overawe you, I could claim a choirful of brethren awaiting my

return, but in truth, there is none alive in this valley save myself."

"And us. Mother and me."

The child's eyes held his. They were uncommonly black, larger and brighter than any waif's ought to be. He spoke again to break their spell.

"The three of us can stand here glaring until the Last Trump sounds. Or we can seek some ground for trust."

"Meaning what?" asked the woman.

"Let us watch each other until the day wanes, until we can be sure neither side has armed confederates lying in concealment." He saw suspicion melting. "Such waiting might be more agreeably done at a grange than in this narrow place."

They agreed to his plan and warily followed him to the farmstead nearest the monastery. They rested in an ancient orchard there amid the fragrance of blossoms and the lulling drone of bees. He studied the newcomers closely while he told his story and bridled inwardly at the thought that they must be doing the same to him.

He saw tattered finery showing through rents in their rough clothing. Animals skins were bound on their feet for boots. Both carried packs made of hide. They had sheathed their knives as a gesture of truce and jammed them through their belt-pouch loops, hunter-style.

The woman was as hard and lean as a well-used spear. Her pale hair was going white, but a trace of vanished beauty lingered in her golden eyes. The child, dark as she was fair, had the tenseness of a drawn bow, even in repose. That raggedly cropped hair and short cote did not deceive him for long. He had trained too many apprentices not to know a gawky youth from an unripe maid. But he refrained from remarking on this disguise until the others had spun their tale.

He coaxed it out of them as if they were potential customers too uneasy to speak their minds. They professed to have been visiting north of the mountains in Lusatia when the pestilence struck. Some in that country survived the sickness, but the disorders unleashed by the epidemic made plague death seem a kinder fate. They themselves had seen a village sacked and burned by brigands but managed to escape. Afterward, a small hunting lodge on the border had sheltered them through the winter. Throughout the ordeal they had dreamed of getting home. Although they declined to give their destination, he assumed from their speech that it lay somewhere in the margravate. Although they would say little of the particular horrors they had witnessed, their silence seemed to him more eloquent than speech.

Otherwise they talked together of small harmless matters and pretended to see figures in the shapes of passing clouds. When the sun was high, they shared a meal. Once roasted, their rabbits went well with his wine and hard bread. Later as they wandered about the grange, the woman expounded on husbandry, identifying the crops that had last been sown in each field. By dusk, their isolation was well and truly proven. Not a fire showed from one

end of the valley to the other. He lit a barn lantern and led them up the curving road to the monastery.

Once there, they helped him swing the great doors shut and bar them. Then despite weariness from the climb, the woman demanded to inspect every part of the place. Perhaps she could not rest peacefully in an unfamiliar den.

Lastly, he brought them to his workshop. "Behold," he said, "I am the goldsmith I claimed to be."

"I didn't need to see this to believe it."

"Why?" Casual acceptance on the heels of earlier suspicion puzzled him.

"You've got the air of a master about you and wasted no words proving it."

He chose to interpret that as deference. It moved him to generosity. "What heart could keep from softening at your plight? Will you accept the hospitality this holy place affords? Let it be a secure refuge for you and your daughter —"

They sprang away from him as if burnt.

"I knew her for a maid as easily as you knew me for a master. Is it evil to see or speak the truth?"

"I've killed to protect her." The woman's hand dropped to her knife hilt. She deftly swung her child behind her into shadow. But the maid poised in the doorway as if reluctant to flee.

"Her maidenhead stands in no danger from me. I have never been one to trifle with innocence." It was a special and heretofore unquestioned point of honor with him. "Accept my oath on it or begone."

"Let us hear your pledge." Her hand remained on her weapon.

Much as it galled him to treat thus with an inferior, he was unwilling to lose the only companions he was likely to get. Drawing his guild amulet from under his habit, he swore on the golden hammer in the sight of his heavenly Patron neither to harm the maid nor to permit her to be harmed.

In the darkness the maid sighed, "Amen."

In the weeks that followed, the woman watched and weighed him so closely he felt like a suspect ingot. Yet to his vague disappointment, no particular instance of fire trial ever came. He could not point to the moment when they first accepted him into the pattern of their lives.

This curious household soon developed its own rhythms. The woman slipped back into the domestic role she must have played in happier times. Having a stout roof over her head and fertile fields about her seemed to blunt her sharpest grief. It was as though a spearshaft put forth roots and boughs.

The arrangement pleased him well — for the first time in many months he had really clean linen to wear. The woman turned the monastery's ample stores of foodstuffs into meals which were savory, if not as sumptuous or subtle as his cook in Praha had been wont to make. She gathered stray chickens and installed them in the monastic stable to provide eggs. The fortunate

discovery of a nanny goat and newborn kid insured a supply of fresh milk. Planting a kitchen garden did not exhaust her energies. She was also determined to sow a field of oats in case their present stock of grain should turn unwholesome. So adamant was her resolve, she was prepared to pull the plow herself and have her daughter guide it.

The goldsmith valued his hands too highly to join in her labors, but the thought of her sweating in harness troubled his mind. He urged her to search the ends of the valley for some surviving horse rather than toil unaided. But he did not accompany her on this quest and declined to handle the animal she eventually captured. The ways of draught beasts were conveniently unknown to him.

In due course, he took the uncomplaining woman to his bed. Their union of flesh brought no union of spirit. She was but the latest in a procession of light ladies that had passed through his life. He had always been too intent upon his art to encumber himself with a wife, and because he regarded his creations as his children, he sought no others.

He never settled the mystery of her past to his satisfaction. Her farm-bred skills and unexpected ease with the ways of her betters argued that she had been some nobleman's peasant concubine, mother of his baseborn child. Or was the maid in fact her daughter? The two were wholly opposite in looks and temper, yet never stood at odds.

While spring planting lasted, the maid kept busy at her mother's side. Then little by little, she grew bold enough to come and watch him at his bench. Though she sat quietly and never lingered long, her black-eyed stare burned into his thoughts. In that self-same way he had watched his own father work. Yielding to her unspoken plea, he allowed her to perform small tasks about the shop. Her diligence persuaded him to grant her additional responsibilities. He found that with her tending the furnace and pumping the bellows, the pace of his work quickened. He was able to finish the last clerics and commence a troop of knights and armsmen.

Because she did not vex him with idle questions, he freely expounded on the practice of smithcraft as if she had been a sworn apprentice. Indeed, he relished such discourse, for he was a scholar of his art and not a mere practitioner of it. Thus, when he had occasion to recover gold from gilt copper, he forged a chain of exegesis worthy of a learned preacher. He figured the process for her as a form of burial and resurrection: he broke the gilded vessel, enshrouded it in a sheet of lead, laid it on a bed of ashes and burnt bone, exposed it to purging fire until like called unto like and the base metal fluxed away from the purified remnant. Whenever he spoke, the maid listened with rapt attention. She gradually came to copy his manner of speech, discarding that of her mother.

When he spied her drawing on bricks, he gave her scraps of parchment to use instead and offered her lumps of wax to model. Confessing that she used to carve small birds and beasts from wood for playthings, she shaped a

graceful dove before his eyes to prove her skill. He could not help but praise her natural gift. However, her reverence for beauty pleased him as much as her struggle to create it. He had not looked to find either trait in a female.

Therefore, he allowed the maid to handle the figures he had already cast. After he unlocked the casket and removed each treasure from its soft cloth pouch, she set them out in ranks. She pretended they were a synod of churchmen guarded by bold warriors, and spun quaint fables about their adventures. All the while she played before him, she became a young child again, unmarred by memories of horror.

Childlike, too, was her faith in his dream, a matter he had not shared with her mother. Although the scar on his hand had grown too faint to bear witness, she readily believed in the miracle to come whereby his images would replenish the land. His confidence scarcely required buttressing by her opinion, yet it gladdened him to see his calling held her in awe.

As her caution melted, they spoke together more often in the shop, telling each other tales of fighting men and curious weapons they had seen. He even copied the short, recurving eastern bow from her drawing. Then one day she forgot her place with an untoward question.

"Why is it, sir, that you make no figures of women? They say the sun gets the rocks with gold, but people are engendered otherwise."

He counted himself indulgent for not striking her.

"The order of creation is mine to choose. I will provide these Adams with their Eves when I see fit and not a single instant sooner."

Her query annoyed him even more than he cared to show, but he forgave it as childish folly. Otherwise the summer flowed by agreeably for the goldsmith. At times he would astonish himself with his own blitheness. Though the world he knew had perished utterly, the consolations of his art remained intact.

Meanwhile, the maid ripened daily like an apple on the branch. Around harvest time she crossed over into womanhood. Aglow with pride in her new station, she unwisely begged a favor of him to commemorate it.

"Please, sir, will you make me a ring such as unpledged virgins of my district wear? There is a red stone in yonder coffer that I fancy —"

"Fancy what you may," he cried. "My work stops for no wench. Get out of my sight until you remember who is master here."

She fled from his wrath but turned back at the threshold. Fire, not tears, rose in her coal black eyes as she spoke in a voice almost too soft to be heard:

"When next I ask, you will not refuse me."

A tremor passed through him as if an unseen bolt had just slammed home.

Faithful to his command, the maid avoided him for days afterward. As it happened, her mother required her full attention because the late warmth of St. Ursula's Summer was now upon them. They hastened to complete both the harvest and the fall planting before this lucky weather broke.

But while they gathered and sowed crops at the grange, the goldsmith was

left to his own resources. He was less eager than usual to fend for himself, since at that moment he was engrossed in modeling the image of the king. After his humiliating failure with the subject earlier, he was anxious that everything go perfectly this time. Indifferent as he was to husbandry, he took it into his head that the others were deliberately shunning him in retaliation for his outburst at the maid. As one who never heeded adverse judgments other men made of his character, to suffer on account of women's low regard was intolerable.

With no one to place hot meals before him, he was forced to pick up whatever he could find in the kitchen. The day turnips were being dug on the terraces he discovered a half-empty basin of custard sitting in its hearthside cooking tripod. Its serving spoon was still within it. The sight aroused more irritation than gratitude: the others must have dined right pleasantly while he was occupied with his casting. He ate their leavings with ill grace.

His anger simmered the rest of the day and throughout the one that followed. By evening it had turned to fever. Stifling fears that this might be a recurrence of plague, he tried to ignore his condition. But discomfort spoiled the festive dinner that celebrated the harvest's ending. While the woman and the maid gorged merrily, he could barely nibble. The prune and lentil fritters gagged him, the farsed pigeon lay heavy on his stomach, and the tricolor creams made him queasy.

Body aching, flesh burning, he spent a wretched night broken by episodes of cramps, vomiting, and flux. The woman bathed his face and gave him cool honey water to drink, but there was little else she could do to ease his misery. The infirmary's store of medicinal herbs and elixirs had been depleted during the general pestilence and never replaced.

Therefore, early next morning, the woman went down to the riverbank to gather willow bark as a remedy for his fever. The maid replaced her mother beside his sickbed, tending him with grave solicitude as if they had never quarreled. But even the gentlest touch pained him. He tossed fitfully under smothering blankets. Nightmares cut his sleep to shreds.

The following dawn he awakened to find the maid in a frenzy because her mother had not yet returned. All she could see from the bell tower was a sooty column of smoke rising beyond the fields. With knife already strapped to her side, she was prepared to search alone. But first she would remove him to the porter's station so he could bar the gate behind her. The effort cost him less than it would have the previous day, but obeying her was still anguish.

Some hours later he heard her calling in a voice turned oddly hoarse. He staggered up from his pallet to admit her. She was driving a cart laden with some kind of lumpy sack.

"Did you find her?" he asked.

"The crows led me to her."

He now knew what the sack held. He did not move while the maid sprang

down and fetched the pallet from the gatehouse. Despite his weakness, he helped her unload the body and carry it to their living quarters. Before he could ask for an account of the misadventure, the maid ripped the sacking open with her knife.

The body was nearly naked, smeared with coal dust and caked with blood. There were stab wounds on the breast and bound arms. Mercifully, the face was covered by a rag. He did not have to meet those golden eyes gone sightless.

The maid spoke in hammer strokes. "My mother fell into the hands of two bandits by the river. They ravished her and made sport of her. While she was bleeding to death from their abuse, they slew one another. The smoke is from a fire they set in a coal pit, whether for torture or some other purpose I cannot tell."

He found his voice. "Where are the killers? You cannot leave their corpses for the crows."

"I rolled their bodies into the river. Let them rot where it cares to take them."

By now he was weak, he could not have lent a hand with the washing and shrouding even if the maid had asked him. Later, he did turn a few clods during the long, slow digging of the grave at the foot of the cemetery cross. They would have rather laid her in the church crypt near the Patron's tomb with its precious relics, but they had not the strength between them to raise a floor slab. The burying done, they prayed the *Miserere* over her and left her to the eternal rest.

In the days that followed, his guilt would have been lighter to bear if only the maid had blamed him. Silence was no mercy, for the words of the psalmist kept falling in his mind like blows. He dreamt of sheet gold beaten into patterns in a bowl of pitch, but what form the decorations took was hidden from his sight. Nor did his fancies end with waking. Hellfire blazed in his furnace whenever he tried to work.

Rather than sit idle, he blistered his fine hands, loading hay and hauling grain at the maid's side. They transferred livestock, foodstuffs, and fuel up to the monastery stable for the winter, then closed the gate against the perils of the season.

Now the maid reproached him. "You sit like a man bespelled, sir. Do you mean to leave your task half-done?"

His numb voice held no anger now. "What is it to you whether I rest or labor?"

Her eyes darkened. "I want death undone."

"Then see to it yourself."

"I will."

Although she did not show him what she had modeled, she did coax him back into the shop to oversee her casting attempt. She put coins recovered from the bandits' loot into the crucible and laid it on the coals. As these

melted, the evil memories stamped upon them seemed to pass away. Fire could purify as well as punish. He found he could bear to take part in the procedure after all. Afterward, it was no surprise that the figure she unmolded was a finely garbed matron, slim and graceful as a lance.

But the tragedy left a foul memorial: there was no extinguishing the fire in the coal seams. Defying rain and snow, it burned relentlessly on, besmirching the sky. It made a hellmouth of the open mine pit, traced steaming tracks where it licked beneath the frozen earth, and spit out noxious smoke through fissures.

Meanwhile, the goldsmith and the maid were too absorbed in fashioning images to worry over the valley's fate. It would not matter once the miracle they were awaiting came. All winter long they labored, bringing forth burghers and peasants. Rendering the craftsmen was his special delight, for it let him recreate a holy day guild procession in Praha. From *majores* to *minores*, he depicted masters of every art, every art save one. Somehow he could not bring himself to shape an ideal goldsmith.

While he hesitated, the maid acted. With merriment and mischief shining in her eyes, she offered him a model of himself. He was flattered by the likeness and admitted that she had caught him well, even to the slight rounding of his shoulders from a lifetime spent at the workbench.

He would have returned the compliment had he been able to decide where to place her in the pageant of life. She seemed to constitute a category of being all her own, as some philosophers said each angel did. He would act as soon as he achieved full understanding.

Until then, he put aside speculation to make good the lack of women in the golden company. Their numbers swelled rapidly, encompassing every condition and degree: the nun with her Gospel book, the lady with her hawk, the wench with her water jug.

This quest for completeness bred debate: should strumpets be included? Or for that matter, ruffians and beggars? The goldsmith, for his part, would have barred the unfit from the flawless society that was to come. The maid surprised him by arguing the contrary. He was still unused to opposition, even from her. She begged him to show the world truly, without pretense of full perfection.

"Let the weeds grow beside the wheat," she said, "and surrender judgment to Heaven."

He grumbled but allowed her to depict a few outcasts.

The keenness of her mind as well as the skill of her hands continued to impress him favorably. He considered taking her back home with him when their purpose had been achieved and offering her articles of apprenticeship. If she could stay the course, it was not unknown for daughters to inherit their fathers' shops. Yet neither masters nor fathers were in the habit of letting those under their rule speak as freely as he now permitted the maid. He wondered if he were entirely prudent to let the pressure of their peculiar cir-

cumstances loosen old restraints.

For not everything she said was pleasing to his ears. After a long session of melting down church plate and altar furnishings to feed their molds, she protested this destruction.

"The artisans of past ages work no more gold in their graves. You may well practice your art for years to come. Why then do you ruin what little remains of the old ones' making while leaving that new crosier of yours untouched?"

He could not answer her reproach, for he would not freely confess how much of his inmost self went into the things he made. (To his mind, heirs of metal were more docile than heirs of flesh could be because they had no life in them apart from their creator's will.) He was loath to smash present beauty in the hope of beauty yet unborn. But her eyes urged sacrifice. With no little regret, he made Abraham's choice. He stripped the gold plate from the staff and gave it to the fire.

After this, progress seemed even smoother than before. He calculated that they should be able to complete all the planned figures without touching the incomparable golden sheathing of the main altar. Their work ought to be finished by late spring. What then? Would more effort be required? The Patron's instructions had been lamentably vague. Perhaps the restoration would come at Paschaltide, but they had no means of determining the date of Easter.

As the days grew warmer, their thoughts turned more and more to the long-awaited triumph. What form would the promised miracle take? He expected some grandiose display of divine power — the sky fanned to flame by angels' wings, the earth melting open, and the plague-slain stirring from their sleep. His notions grew in splendor each time he voiced them.

The maid listened attentively but spun no fancies of her own. "Imagine what you will," she said. "The real wonder will be greater still, as waking surpasses dreaming."

She begged him not to wait idly for deliverance once the last images were cast. Whether the miracle came swiftly or slowly, there were still crops to be planted. Neglecting the needs of the morrow would be gross presumption.

Her plea fell on fertile ground. After months of confinement, the fine soft weather was making him restless. With the queen the only major piece remaining to be cast, what harm could there be in a brief delay? When the maid accepted his offer to lend a hand with the farm work, he felt himself ennobled by his show of humility.

The maid led the horse down to the grange and hitched it to the plow for him. She explained the task ahead with brisk good cheer, as if sport rather than toil were in prospect. They would be breaking new earth this time while leaving last year's field fallow. It would be no easy feat with only the one draught beast, but once they had tilled, she would harrow and then he would sow. He jested that plowing was merely a coarse form of engraving,

and likened the oats to granules of gold.

His smiles soon turned to groans. He sweated to make his furrows straighter than hers as they took turns guiding the plow. Close attention and much wheedling were required to keep the horse even close to the proper course. By late afternoon they had finished one small plot. The results might not have satisfied an experienced tiller of the soil, but they were well pleased with themselves. The maid spoke of putting up a scarecrow lest the birds eat all the grain before it could sprout. As a token of its promise, she pointed out the field where the bit of winter wheat she and her mother had planted was beginning to show green.

Attending to the horse would finish their day. Then they could seek badly needed refreshment for themselves. The goldsmith watched the rubbing down from a discreet distance. The usually placid beast kept fretting and wickering in its stall despite the maid's attempts to soothe it. Was she mis-handling it or had too much idleness over the winter spoiled its temper? At length the tedious chore was done.

They came out of the barn to face the drawn arrows of strange horsemen. The seven intruders, barbarously clad in felt garments and fur caps, bestrode shaggy, big-headed ponies. The ruffians jabbered in several unknown languages, but their intent was clear enough. Neither the goldsmith nor the maid dared resist. Then they were cruelly bound and separately tethered to the paddock posts. By crawling and stretching, they could barely reach the ends of the horse trough but not each other. Attempts to converse drew blows, so they kept silent under their guards' narrow eyes.

At first the goldsmith started in stupefied amazement, like a man felled by a club. Two of the riders cautiously circled the grange, weaving around the buildings, cutting across the newly sown field, and trampling the tender shoots of wheat. With a greater show of confidence they sped up to the monastery. They returned within the hour to confer with their fellows, then galloped away down the pilgrim road.

Rage cleared his head. How dare these savages turn his dreams to ashes! Had the maid not lured him down to the valley, he might still be safe behind the monastery's battle-ried walls. Or had she been defter in her horse-handling, they might have made a safe retreat. He turned his face from her, glad of the enforced silence.

Night fell. Their captors cooked supper in the open but offered them no food. As befitting their brutish nature, they retired to the barn rather than to the lay brothers' cells. One of the five stood watch at all times.

Had he had a full stomach and a thick blanket, he could still not have slept on that hard ground. Bonds chafed his stiff limbs, and the dampness of his soiled clothing chilled him. He tried lapping water from the trough, but it tasted of brimstone. Besides the stench of the guard's body, the breeze bore the reek of distant coal fires. A pall of smoke blotted out most of the stars.

Helplessness was the worst torment of all. When he thought he could not

stand another moment without screaming, the moment passed with him still holding himself in check and another moment of ordeal took its place. He retreated into his pride as into a stronghold and gouged out pictures of revenge in his mind. He hammered barbarian images shapeless on his anvil, heated them in his forge, and quenched them in blood.

Throughout the morning, noise from the depths of the earth beat on his ears. It hissed, it crashed, it rumbled ever louder. He saw the horde's dust before the riders, herds, and heavily laden wagons came into view. As they rolled in by the hundreds, he knew his complaints against the maid for utter folly. They could not have resisted this force were all the original brethren of the monastery at their side and armed like Gregorian guards.

These invaders were generally clad in the same manner as their scouts. Men and women alike wore loose trousers, tunics, and pointed caps. Touches of colored stitching and gold baubles brightened their otherwise drab costume. They seemed a chance-met mixture of various tribes and peoples. Many were swarthy and flat-faced, but their fairer and proud-nosed leaders might have passed for Rhomanoi if they bathed and barbered. He could not put a name to this motley nation. But when he spied a horsetail banner borne past by men with drums and rattles, a certain memory stirred. These folk must be the plague makers whose wizards slew by magic to empty distant lands for conquest. He shivered as their shadows passed over him.

The horde swept through the grange and camped a little ways beyond it toward the river. A detachment of warriors headed for the monastery. Bulging loads on the pack horses they led back later bespoke heavy looting. They had even taken the goats and trussed up the precious chickens. He winced at the flash of gold and bright enamelwork that could only have come from the high altar's paneling.

Why did the Saint permit his holy mountain to be plundered? The goldsmith strained his eyes till they watered, peering for a glimpse of the casket that held his figures. It was his fault, not the maid's, that he had fallen short. How could he have come this close to his goal and failed to reach it? He could not admit defeat, even in these dire straits. Somehow he would survive, he would escape, he would complete God's own commission.

Clamor and screaming erupted from the enemy camp. Swarms of savages ran or galloped in circles. After the mob thinned, he was able to see the cause of their alarm. It appeared that a nearby swath of ground had collapsed, tipping some wagons. Wisps of black smoke rose from the sunken strip.

Here was the first sign of the Saint's displeasure. Surely, greater prodigies were to come. He must be patient. It was a test of faith. At all costs he must cling to his belief in the miracle. He glanced at the maid and saw her mother's grimness in her. She, too, remained unconquered. He inclined his head in her direction, and she returned his bow.

But hunger gnawed at their courage as the day wore on. The maddening

odors of cooking drifted in from the camp. Men with drawn knives led the draught horse away. After sunset, their captors dragged them to a communal fire where their horse was now roasting on a giant spit. There, they were bound once more in a painful kneeling position, wrists lashed to ankles. The barbarians threw gobbets of half-burnt meat before them and howled as they fell on their faces to devour the food like dogs. One female tormentor squirted them with a vile liquid that stank like sour milk and gestured for them to lick it off their robes. The grinning throng closed around them. Flames glinted on their eyes and ornaments and naked steel. He vainly tried to edge closer to the maid, expecting at any instant they would suffer their horse's fate. Then all coarse laughter died.

Out of the darkness rode the queen. Huge and majestic she looked on her tall stallion. She reined in so near them he could feel her mount's breath on his face. None would have called her mannish features beautiful. Brown braids coiled under her massive diadem. He could not tell the color of her eyes. Bright embroidery surged over her garments and horse trappings, engulfing even the soles of her boots. Her garb glittered with plaques in the shape of men's severed heads, and the image of a wolf rending a winged horse adorned her diadem. Her archer's ring caught the light like a spark as she flung up a clenched fist.

A dark man limped out of the shadows to stand beside her stirrup. He must have been a formidable fighter once, perhaps a Christian knight. But now aging flesh hung slackly on his broad frame. His right arm and eye were gone, and he was weaponless.

After a few false starts, he addressed them in their own tongue overlaid with a florid Carpathian accent: "The queen of the Ossetyar permits you slime-spawn to show her reverence. She commands you to tell her how it is that you survive when this land has thus far yielded no other living man?"

The goldsmith replied, "By the favor of our Saint, we were spared."

"The shrine of our Saint is a place of great power," added the maid.

When their answers were translated, the queen laughed, and with her, the crowd.

The translator gave her response. "If this spirit you worship is so strong, why did it allow you to fall into our hands?"

"He will not abandon us," said the goldsmith.

The queen found this an even better jest and passed back her retort. "Fools will say such things, even after they have spent years as our slaves. But you will not live long enough to have the honor of serving us unless you answer our question." She opened her fist to reveal one of his figures. "Where has the goldsmith who made this thing concealed himself?"

"We know nothing of his hiding place," cried the maid.

The queen was not to be denied. "Our warriors found a workshop of recent use in yonder stronghold. Since neither of you filthy plough-hands looks like a master craftsman, where is the missing goldsmith?"

He saw a glimmer of hope for them in her insult but dared not tell a direct lie. "If he is not here, we do not know where he may be found."

The queen gave orders to her men which the translator obligingly repeated for the captives. "Put the young one to the test first. He does not seem as strong and will break quicker under torture."

The maid's dark eyes went wide, but she did not flinch when a guard ripped off her monk's habit and revealed her small breasts.

The mob whooped and bayed like a wolf pack in their glee until the queen stilled them. She threatened the goldsmith.

"Unless you tell us what we desire, we will throw your concubine to our warriors. They seem hungry for her, do they not? But answer truthfully, and she will be spared that shame."

The goldsmith writhed in agony of soul. His sworn oath to keep the maid from harm had to be obeyed at any cost. "I am he whom you seek! Behold, around my neck hangs the emblem of the goldsmith's guild in which I hold the rank of master."

The interpreter fumbled under the neck of his habit and brought forth the hammer amulet. He would have plucked it off the chain, but the queen stayed his hand and spoke through his voice:

"That trinket is too small to interest us. Keep your toy badge by our favor. The hammer you work with is what we claim. Henceforth you shall wield it for us alone."

The triumphant tyrant shook the tiny figure she still held and departed whence she came.

The maid was handed over to the keeping of some crones. As she was led away, she called to him, "Do you think me so weak that I would have betrayed you or our dream?" Reproach flamed in her firelit eyes.

The goldsmith was taken in the opposite direction and confined in a wagon. Weariness finally got the better of his woe, and he slept.

They woke him at dawn and gave him food he could barely taste. Then the interpreter came to him accompanied by a grizzled old tribesman who wore a necklace of finger bones and carried a heavy leather satchel. The lackey spoke in a more familiar tone than on the previous evening.

"My mistress the queen says you monks are lesser men than she thought, since your wench is still a virgin."

The goldsmith smothered his fury at insolence he was powerless to punish.

The interpreter affected not to notice. "Your presence is required this morn at a solemn ritual. She who is both queen and priestess will offer sacrifice to pacify the spirits in this place of burning earth before they curse the treasure taken here."

"And afterward?"

"You are to join the queen's own household to fashion gold for her in such a manner as she desires. And lest you think to flee, she has given orders that

you are to be lamed."

"Lamed? What are you saying?" he cried.

"This healer's knife and cautery irons are ready." He pointed to the old man. "He is skilled and will make short work of it." That single dull eye filmed with something like pity for one about to enter the brotherhood of the maimed.

The goldsmith walked among his captors as haughtily as if he were leading his guildmates to a coronation. If these were to be his last steps, he would execute them perfectly. Each placing of heel and toe made him all too keenly aware of how wonderful the movements of bones, tendons, and muscles were. He would want to recall it exactly in the days to come.

They made their way through crowds to stand near a furiously burning coal seam. Smoke and foul mephitic vapors welled from the crackling depths. They forced him to kneel as before to have his wrists and ankles lashed together.

The ceremony began with distant drumming. A pole topped by a wolf's skull sheathed in gold went before the procession. Drum-beating pagan priests curiously clad in hides and feathers followed the royal standard. Behind them, gaudy youths shouldered pallets that might have supported idols at other times. Today, the beast-headed poles bore the plunder of the monastery. The last carrier held the golden figures marshaled in ranks so close they could not fall. He nearly wept to see his creations hemmed in by snarling maws. The bearers laid their precious burdens along the very lip of the cleft and withdrew.

Lastly came the queen herself, this time garbed in woman's skirts and decked with an emperor's ransom in jingling gold. Afoot she did not seem so tall, being short of leg and graceless of step. She was leading the naked and shivering maid on a silken leash.

But before the goldsmith could raise a cry, the interpreter gagged him with his only hand.

"Keep silent," he whispered. "Else they will give her a harder death. I know their ways."

Thus, he could do naught but stare at the horror soon to unfold. He prayed to follow his maid to her doom, for sooner would he perish than ever ply his trade to suit that royal she-wolf. The maid's state seemed more pitiful as the droning chants wore on. Tight bonds were turning her hands livid. Her broad shoulders were hunched against the chill, and her head was bowed. He had never seen her look so meek. Surely, they had not drugged her? Devils would sooner be merciful than these folk. He panted out his pleas to Heaven against the interpreter's steady, muffling hand. His wrath kindled white-hot that innocence should suffer. Then words that flowed and burned streamed across his mind:

As gold in the furnace He has tried them;

As a holocaust He has received them.

He chewed his lips until the blood came.

The chanting continued. The queen jerked her victim back and forth along the row of heaped-up plunder. They halted beside the pallet that held the fateful images. The queen placed her hands purposefully on the maid's back, ready to push her into the smoky trench. Suddenly, the slack body straightened. The maid kicked backward. She hooked the queen's leg with her foot. Her tormentor collapsed. They went over the edge together while onlookers screamed. But the queen's flailing arm overturned the treasure pallet. The figures fell like blessed golden rain upon the quenchless fire.

The goldsmith rammed restraint aside. He pitched forward, shrieking, and struck his head. A burst of ghastly stench from the pit overwhelmed him, and his awareness melted away.

The world shifted and shimmered about him as he opened his eyes. He must have been dozing again. Curious that it had left him feeling wearier, not fresher. And try as he might, he could not quite remember the past hour's dream.

"Not a dream," a voice resonant with authority spoke in his mind. *"Not in the least a dream. Reality was melted, cast, and remelted into other shapes than you know now. And this passage through fire has also left its mark upon you, for while you slept, your spirit was sent forth to renew a spell-corroded world."*

He frowned more in puzzlement than alarm. Since he could make no sense of the words, he dismissed them. Older men were sometimes troubled by noises in their ears as well as heaviness in their eyelids. The tarnish of age must be spreading in him faster than he had looked for. Refusing to indulge in regret, he returned his attention to the censer he was fashioning for the Pope's legate.

This exacting occupation was soon interrupted by an apprentice who cringed so pitifully that he had to be coaxed into delivering his message. Whatever was the lad afraid of?

"Begging your pardon, sir, we've a young Moravian lady and her gentlewoman outside asking for you. They insisted you be called — we wouldn't have. . . ." The lad croaked, swallowed, and continued: "Her ladyship wants you to set some gem she's got in a ring."


Excusing the trembling messenger, he rose and walked slowly to the counter at the front of his shop. A lively wind whistled in his new furnace chimney, for the spring day had turned blustery while he slept. His journeymen and other apprentices bobbed their heads respectfully as he passed. He could not fathom why his acknowledging smile drew such anxious glances, for he accounted himself well-blessed in his workers. By standing on their shoulders he had raised himself high above all other goldsmiths in Prague.

Now he could see his waiting patrons. Even under the shelter of the awning, the lady's sheer veil fluttered about her netted headdress, and the folds of her gold-embellished garments stirred. Averting her face, she modestly

left the actual conduct of her business to her attendant.

Severe and correct in widow's robes, the gentlewoman proffered a palm-sized casket which he opened. Within lay a jewel the color of blood cut in the shape of a heart.

He examined it and exclaimed: "Never have I seen the like! It will be more delight than labor to give this stone a worthy setting. Will your ladyship permit her finger to be measured? Afterward, I will compute the cost of the ring."

She made no reply but stepped forward with outstretched hand. As she clasped his, the wind blew her veil aside. And he knew her by her coal-black eyes. 

THOSE WHO EAT THE PAST, THOSE WHO EAT THE FUTURE

In dead cities we devour
the wind-scoured stone,
the blood of chronos splayed
on the palate with precision.

In vintage ruins we decant
the enchanted afternoons
where legends have arisen,
and catch a fast reflection

in the dimness of the glass
of diners like ourselves,
with courses on collision.
We swallow and are swallowed

like the world-winding snake,
where the dishes are arrayed,
a feast of living tales,
and all the guests partake.

— Bruce Boston

A TOUCH OF HOME

by Steven Dimeo
art: Terry Lee

Formerly a college professor, Fulbright scholar, and editor of the New Oregon Review, Steven Dimeo has published fiction and poetry since 1967 in such magazines as Ovi, Michigan Quarterly Review, Crosscurrents, and The Mendocino Review. Publications in which his poetry has appeared include The Princeton Review, Blue Unicorn, Golden Isis, and New Pathways SF. He has recently completed work on his seventh book, Not in Our Stars, an occult mystery.

Currently, the author lives with his wife and cockapoo-dachshund in his hometown of Hillsboro, Oregon.

In my beginning is my end.

— "East Coker," T. S. Eliot

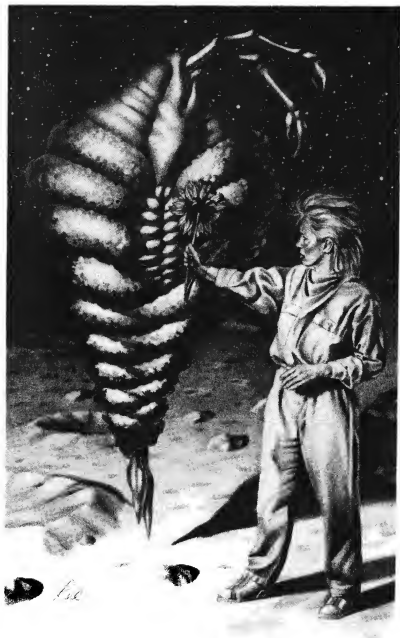
For the error bred in the bone
Of each woman and each man
Craves what it cannot have,
Not universal love
But to be loved alone.

— "September 1, 1939," W. H. Auden

For years my life as Worldkeeper of Ceres was the kind I'd only dreamed about in my Callisto Colony days. With Alterra beside me to the perfunctory disapproval of Belt Station officials, I could tolerate the frequent environmental setbacks and even the night skirling of the unseen Cereans from their chasms.

But all that changed once the creatures ventured to the surface and the explosions began.

Not that explosions weren't exactly unknown on this largest asteroid in the solar system. Before I'd arrived, eager to be alone and face a new challenge late in life, planetary engineers had set off a series of explosions to regularize the rotation, provide gravity enough for the start-up of a new ecosystem, and shake loose the sterilizing salt of the surface that could be put to better use elsewhere. They had, at the same time, cracked open the crust like an egg, reactivating the surprisingly molten core to such a small world, releasing large quantities of chlorine gas — and opening up a new world to the subterranean Cereans who had strangely gone undetected.



The theory was that the natives were likely silicon-based life forms to have been able to escape detection by our carbon-oriented sensors — just one more confirmation that engineers were not the most far-sighted creatures themselves. What amazed the engineers more, however, was that the Cereans chose to remain at the bottom of the crevices, shrilling up into their new yellow-green skies while the unflappable planetologists went ahead installing the ecogenerator at the magnetic north pole.

By the time I got there to help pave the way for eventual colonization, the ecogenerator had introduced a breathable atmosphere with decidedly mixed results. The asteroid was now habitable but climatologically unstable, subject to erratic windstorms which were to be my boon and bane: they helped spread seeds as well as the newly enriched soil.

Those storms didn't deter the planetologists who actually space-ferried in tons of organic fertilizers to the region surrounding the domed base just north of the equator. It was just like Belt Station administrators not to see the humor in that. I had applied for this position with the express purpose of getting away from waste — human waste, at any rate.

Despite the promising oasis of sorts that surrounded the dome, I clearly had my work cut out for me. The first time I looked out on this world through the glass floor of the paraglobe, I remember thinking corporate heads had to be desperate to settle for an asteroid like this — but then I knew they were. If Eden Unlimited were to stay alive in such precarious times, the corporation needed more space for colonists at any cost to produce more food, mine more ore, and end up somewhere down the line with more of a profit.

Whatever gains, though, that Alterra and I had made in the past fourteen Earth years (just over three Cerean revolutions), these new unexplained explosions threatened to undermine them all.

If I'd come to cherish the privacy Alterra and I had in what was literally a world of our own making, I knew the time had also come to reach out for help — help in discovering the reasons behind the explosions and, once we understood, in protecting the outpost and the future of our presence on this asteroid.

So it was with considerable ambivalence that I led Alterra out to the landing site west of the base dome near our wheat fields on the day the roborep arrived.

Though I held her small white hand too tightly, she didn't complain. She had, after all, been the one to open me up to touching another human again.

Besides, she was too busy gawking at the Circuit Monitor as it glided down through air still streaked in places with yellow. With its massive solar panels outspread against the sky, it looked to me like some painfully pregnant butterfly. The bulb at its base unpeeled like a petal opening, there was a click and a pneumatic hiss as it released the cargo bulb, then, its solar wings breaking at numerous joints, folding in on itself like something out of

ancient origami, it hovered before us, its rotors humming. A dull red light blipped at its tapered top as it spoke in its labored monotone. The red light still looked brighter than the ghostly dime-sized sun trying to shine through above it.

"Hello, hello, Caleb Prouse, Caleb Prouse," it hailed. "I am come to help."

I think the language programmer had overreacted a bit to complaints of too much "computerese" in the last model. But after its last two visits — each at harvest time every Cerean year — I no longer snickered at the colorful modernization of King James English.

The supplies amounted to more seeds, supplemental fertilizing compounds, new programming rings for the base computer — and ion-bomb beamers. As if what we needed were *more* explosions!

"I had hoped for more — *manpower*," I managed.

Alterra was tilting her head at the machine, smiling as though she had already figured out the nature of the mechanism.

"We have not the men — nor the machines — to spare, Caleb Prouse," it pontificated. "You had the chance to engineer a team of workers in days long past, but you chose another course." Inside its "head," an angled silver disc swiveled, briefly conjuring a miniature hologram of Alterra inside the spinning.

The scream of a creature echoed from a nearby chasm. To the southwest the air was coiling into thickening clouds.

It was pointless to tell the roborep I had yet to regret my choice.

But its subtle reprimand reminded me of that electric joy that had coursed through me when I lifted Alterra from the chemical womb of the kit and held her aloft in the indigo Cerean atmosphere and knew the reality of a being that had actually grown from one of my own brain cells. After one Cerean month by myself, I had decided to clone only one person — and engineered her to be female. All the while Alterra had matured somehow in the midst of this asteroid's raw beauty, I had also grown to love her as the companion I never really had.

Those other "companions" shimmered into dim remembrances now — Leslana leaving me on Callisto for my partner who had bilked me out of what little I owned of our dome-building company; Tina, the biochemist at the Belt Station who flaunted our affair like her sterilization badge and could only congratulate me with a handshake when I won the job as Worldkeeper, though she knew it would mean the end of our relationship.

Still holding onto Alterra, I placed my other hand over hers. She pressed closer, eyes still fixed on the Circuit Monitor.

"You're treating this like an uprising," I countered. "We don't know that for sure. Why, after all, would the Cereans wait so many years to move against us?"

"Ceres must become self-sufficient," it clicked back. "That is the primary

directive.”

Nothing like a little understanding from man’s most advanced extension of himself. Alterra and I just looked at each other.

“I am Worldkeeper of Ceres,” I said. Even if my domain had been nothing more than a garbage scow, it was still mine. Better to rule in hell, as the poet says — though I felt already it had come close to heaven. “We can’t face this threat alone.”

So far the explosions had substantially damaged the rim of our fruit orchards and the fir trees that stood like man-sized buffers to the south. That put them well beyond the electromagnetic force-field fence that protected the dome and landing site where we kept the paraglobe, but the Cereans were clearly getting closer.

“This will be my final visitation,” it droned. “You have all you will need.”

I was beginning to think I was talking to one of my ex-wives.

Then an idea clicked. “Something’s wrong at the Station, isn’t it?” I asked.

The red light brightened, then faded. “It is true that there have been cost overruns and mandatory cutbacks of late. It is also true that only a skeleton crew now controls the Belt Station. Of necessity, roboreps have been ordered to patrol a greater range. But we will continue to register your monthly transmissions and will monitor with interest your efforts to deal with this temporary crisis. Do not worry.”

So this was the help I was getting! They were cutting the umbilical. Ready or not, we were left to our own devices — and the devices of these creatures, whatever they were.

“Verily, thou shalt reap what thou sowest,” I answered.

Its insides pattered a moment. “Well-spoken, Caleb Prouse, Caleb Prouse!”

Alterra let go of my hand to hold both of hers over her mouth, trying to repress her giggles.

“Fare thee well, Worldkeeper of Ceres,” it twanged as its rotors whirred into takeoff mode.

From the mountains another explosion thundered out laughter of its own.

Then the machine’s veined panels creaked outward, shadowing the both of us, and spun up, glinting, into the wild blinking of the stars still barely visible in the twilight that was day on Ceres.

“Do not worry!” Alterra mocked, tapping my arm. “You have nothing to lose but your lives!”

I let a smile flicker back. But out the side of my eyes, I could see the advancing windstorm. I grabbed her hand again, and we hurried out of the shifting air.

Even from inside the more controlled environment of the dome, Alterra and I could sense the electricity. When I yanked off my shirt, it crackled, eerily illuminating the dimness of our sleeping quarters. And when I kissed

her on the forehead, sparks stung at my lips.

Outside the vacuum of the windows, the storm hissed like suicidal insects. It brought very little rain.

Hands fisted, acting now more like a little girl again, Alterra pleaded with me to let her sleep next to me in my berth.

I'd always had difficulty telling her no. That was only part of the reason I hesitated now.

Within the past few Cerean months, she had at least physiologically matured into a young woman. What was especially disconcerting was that she kept acting as though nothing had changed. Further, her sudden maturity — or my sudden awareness of it — had come at a critical point in the development of this asteroid. Where before I had feared only that we would be too successful too soon and be forced to give up our intimacy to wholesale colonization, I now feared we would lose our world in every sense of the word.

So I relented.

She wriggled out of her pant tunic and leaped into my berth, clutching the densely knit white coverlet tight up over her mouth, giggling wide-eyed. She hadn't been wearing anything underneath.

I remember thinking fleetingly how pale and fragile she looked — and how she may well have needed a mother here. That was all before I blushed.

Whenever I'd caught her showering in the infrared booth every evening after work, I'd thought of her in the same way I had when I'd bathed and changed her as a baby. Not now.

"Come on, Cal," she said. (I preferred her calling me that; "Dad" wasn't strictly correct anyway.) She stuck out a bare arm and patted the taut sheet. "I'm freezing in here."

I'd forgotten to switch on the heating element in the curved glass cover over the berth.

Without meeting her eyes, I took off the rest of my clothes — all but my shorts — and slipped in beside her.

Then before I started to slide the glass cover down over us, I looked at her in the berth's golden light. Her nose was small and round and resembled mine more in the fact that it flared out too much at the base. Her face struck me as long, Madonna-like, with that high forehead and her small, vaguely dimpled chin. Her lips likewise were too small and narrow. But in that glow, she still seemed too beautiful to have come from me.

Rather than shivering now, she bit her bottom lip, a habit I had also developed. Then she gripped my arm as though it were a life line. "You're always so warm, Cal." She snuggled closer, squirming her cold feet in between my calves.

The lulling hiss of the climate controller in the wall almost overwhelmed the bonelike cracking of the ground explosions. We could feel them even through the berth's cushions. They were closer than ever.

Her skin seemed to tingle, almost hum, where it touched my own.

My voice broke as I thought back on what the roborep had said. "We've never been this alone before."

Her shell-blue eyes flicked up at me. "Haven't we?" The gold light picked up the hint of red in her long hair, which swirled like another quieter storm around the white of the pillowcase.

I knew what she meant.

I leaned over and kissed her quite naturally, not on the forehead this time but on her dry lips. She wreathed her arms around me and kissed me back hard, our teeth clicking the way they had when she was much younger. We fumbled in our touching — but tenderly, firmly somehow. I was the one holding back.

Afterward, she lay her head on my chest, and I stroked her hair which felt almost liquid. With her ear pressed against me, she said she was positive our hearts were beating in unison. Even if it wasn't true, it was nice to hear her say that.

Before I fell asleep, my mind lapsed back — I'm not sure why — to that day when she was only one and a half Cerean years old. We were sitting Indian fashion on a rocky knoll overlooking the wheat I had yet to harvest. She chewed on a piece of chicken breast she had prepared for our picnic.

Then she had just blurted out, "How did I come to be, Cal?"

I'd become used to her obsessive curiosity but still measured my words. Slowly I said, "You came from me, Alterra."

Head tilted, she snapped her fingers. "Just like that?"

"Not quite," I smirked.

"The way mankind itself came about?" She had been fascinated by the etiological myths of ancient Palestine, Greece, and Rome.

I tore out a clump of grass which thrived exceedingly well in the now-rich soil. Using it as a visual aid, I tried haltingly to explain cloning to a girl who was almost seven Earth years old.

"Like Minerva being born from the head of Zeus?" she said.

"Almost." I half-smiled. "Except that I'm no god."

She blinked at me a moment before wiping off her lips. "But you're making over a world like gods have. We don't have to be gods to be godlike, do we?"

The thought surprised me in one so young.

"One of the sad things about being human, Alterra," I said at last, "is that we all want gods to believe in when we're growing up. But the older we get, the more we need to believe we ourselves can become those gods. We can't really have either — not for long, anyway. All we ever have," I said as I held one of her hands in both of mine, "is each other."

She gazed out over the wheat. "I wonder if we'd have a better chance if we just tried to be more *human*."

Then she squeezed one of my hands and wrinkled her face into a smile as

she gave a childish shrug.

More human.

That thought lingered as I held a sleeping young woman in my arms, the salty smell of sex clinging like a web between us still.

I awoke before she did and stared at her for a long time as she slept. Her eyelids were the rosy lavender of the Earth's dusty summer sunsets I could still remember from my childhood.

When she finally roused with an easy yawn and a half-stretch of one arm, I asked her if she was all right. She answered with a close-mouthed smile, half-coy, half-sheepish. She still looked tired despite what I knew from her breathing had been a very deep sleep.

That was the only reference we made about our night together. I figured — was afraid that? — she would think differently about it later and, realizing there would come a time when she would have to meet others, knew I would have to as well.

The only time she ventured outside that day was to nurse along her sunflowers just outside the entry shell to the dome. It was her own pet project she liked to refer to as "a touch of home," though she'd only known Earth through the teletexts. The rest of the day she spent inside the hydroponics chamber.

So it was up to me to inspect the damage. The storm itself had cracked branches and scored the bark of many of the more established trees, but the ground explosions had been far more devastating. Dangerously near the paraglobe — our only way out of here now — a grove of fir trees outside the force field lay scattered like ancient *I Ching* sticks.

I breathed in deeply near the crater. The air had a sickly freshness I couldn't quite place.

The metascanner picked up chemical traces indicating the cause to be a potassium-based explosive.

That night I could only toy with our home-grown vegetables and chicken. Alterra ate more eagerly. Toward the end, she reached across the gleaming white table where she'd placed a single sunflower in a tall plastic beaker and touched the back of my hand as she smiled faintly. Her hand felt cold, though her palm was damp with sweat.

When I was ready for bed — much earlier than usual — she stood at the threshold to the sleeping quarters. The light from the glass-lined wall behind her made a silhouette of her body through the white pant tunic.

As I hoisted myself to the edge of the berth, I linked my eyes uncertainly with hers. She approached. The light over the sleep cylinder that splayed out from the head over the length of the bed only shadowed her face. I couldn't see enough to know what she was thinking.

In the distance either another Cerean cried out or the wall climate compressor was acting up again. Whatever it was, we both flinched.

And she was suddenly in my arms, her own clamped about my neck.

"Sometimes," she whispered, "I don't think I could get close enough to you even if I had the power to crawl inside your skin."

My voice was hoarse when I rejoined, "At least one of us has the power."

And with a smirk she made my hand snake to the velcro clasp between her breasts.

Even this time it seemed like a dream. But it isn't often we experience the same dream two nights in a row. Or more.

One evening that first week after the roborep left when we sat down to a dinner of fresh eggs Alterra had gathered, she was strangely quiet, bottom lip over top at one side. She forked open the yolks and started to sop up her favorite part of the egg with some of our computerized oven's dry bread.

"Cal?" she said, eyes still on the plastic plate.

I nodded as I ate. I was hungrier than I'd been in days.

"Do you think it would be okay," she began, "if we had — I mean — if we procreated?"

The computer was as much to blame as I was, I guess, for her way of putting things.

I hadn't told her before because it didn't seem to matter. "Sterilization is required of all Belt Station personnel," I explained, my bite of bread stuck halfway down. After Leslana and the fiasco on Callisto, I had actually welcomed the process. "Besides, even if we could mate, we'd run the same risk of promoting genetic defects as identical twins." I tried to look at her and act nonchalant, but her eyes were still locked on the broken yolk.

"I'd just like to give you back something that's as much a part of me," she said, eyes filling now. "I mean, you've given me more than just my life, Cal."

Touching her now would only make her cry. I tried to stay rational. "You can always clone another being yourself," I offered.

Alterra pinched her lips to a thin line. "That wouldn't really be the same, would it?"

Then she slipped around the table and kissed me on the temple, holding me a moment with one hand as she stood, hips cocked with her weight on one leg.

Then, without donning her jacket, she went outside into the falling night.

It was unusually warm even for fall here, but as she walked, she held herself.

That was the first time I really felt helpless to help her — in more ways than one, as I was soon to find out.

The only indication I had that something else was wrong came from the west telemonitor near the landing site. Something flitted at the corner of the screen. The red light buzzed on overhead.

I had the camera pan left and right beyond the entry shell.

Alterra was meandering toward the paraglobe, kicking the ground idly and glancing back at the dome over her shoulder.

I scrambled out the entry and shouted to her. She turned. She didn't seem to hear. I waved her toward me frantically.

In the halogen sentry light now, her eyes scintillated.

She was just starting back when it happened.

The field fence crackled — then erupted suddenly in a burst of gold.

I was still running when the force of the explosion shoved her into me, sending both of us crumpling to the ground.

I groped for her arm, tugged her half-crouching toward the dome.

I glanced at the paraglobe. Still intact. But the explosion had been within a hundred meters — and it had interrupted the force field.

Our defenses offered a gaping hole now for the invasion.

I thrust Alterra through the entry chamber before I leaped in myself and slammed the heavy door. Then I rushed to the control panel, threw the force-field power to maximum, stared up at the eyes of our monitors, hoping the surge would jump the inoperative posts and complete the circuit once more.

That's when we both caught our first glimpse.

It was hovering just beyond the gap.

I flicked the camera to maximum telefocus.

Coils encircled its body and something glistened as it undulated back and forth as though waiting for something. A rent at its center parted gummily. Something glared yellow from its tapering top and base. Its scream over the microphones was more like rocks clacking together than the saurian braying it had sounded like from inside the chasms.

Then before I had a chance to get a complete spectrographic reading, it angled off on a vortex of yellowish mist that followed it into the darkness like a tail.

At that point lightning stuttered between the functioning posts, and the plastic-like curtain of energy twisted back into place, bypassing the fallen posts.

Alterra and I just looked at each other.

Why hadn't the creature led a legion of Cereans through the hole in the fence? Why had it merely lurked like that as if out of fear or confusion?

I wrapped my arm around Alterra. She nuzzled against my side, still looking off distantly at the monitors.

I investigated the scene the next day with the metascanner. What we discovered only deepened the mystery.

We had turned the field fence off to explore the crater. Nothing new there.

But some distance away near the apple orchard, we noticed a trail of colorless granules on a plateau of rocks.

It was just like Alterra to start to reach out for the strange substance before I had a chance to power on the metascanner. I held her back with an arm while I waved the detector over the crystals.

I scratched my head with my free hand. "Potassium chlorate," I said.

"An explosive?" she said.

I nodded. It explained that strangely familiar smell around the craters. The compound was still being used in matches back on Earth.

"It reacts violently at the slightest movement when exposed to substances like phosphorous or sulphur or even organic compounds like sugar or charcoal." And, I thought with some admiration, it was particularly lethal to carbon-based life forms.

If that suggested intelligence on the part of these creatures, then why their peculiar hesitation in finishing us off?

This aborted assault and the unusually warm weather (it had never gotten as warm as 19°C here before) made me worry about the ecogenerator. But a check of its monitors showed only a slight drop in its efficiency and minor fluctuations in the atmospheric content.

More importantly, the seismometer had recorded no explosions anywhere close to the ecogenerator. They occurred only near the base.

But if the Cereans really wanted their world back, why not take out the ecogenerator first? Though buried in the crust, it would be particularly vulnerable to creatures adept at scouring through earth.

For a few days all we heard at night were the clacking cries as they huddled out of view of our cameras at the edges of the base.

Hardly a breeze stirred now. The air smelled suffocatingly stale.

Without sharing a word, Alterra and I could sense what was happening. The Cereans had to be amassing for the full-scale attack we had anticipated long before. All we had to defend ourselves with were the ion beamers — and God only knew how effective they would be against creatures we now knew to be composed solely of rock crystals and gases.

To hedge our bets, I decided to spend one day readying the paraglobe for departure. I took that opportunity to encircle it with a force field of its own.

"But this is our *home*," Alterra protested.

"Just if everything else fails," I tried to rationalize without meeting her eyes.

She softened at that.

But the truth was we wouldn't be able to go far in the paraglobe, anyway. It wasn't capable of traveling as far as the Belt Station. We would have to orbit till help came — and considering the roborep's form of moral support the last time, that might be a very long time.

That same evening as she stared out the porthole, hands clasped behind her, she said, "I just don't think they mean to destroy us, Cal. If there was just some way we could communicate with them —"

I clucked at her innocence. But there was something in her eyes, a hopeful enthusiasm, I guess, that stopped me from chiding her. "Communicate?" I coughed.

"As you told the Circuit Monitor, it just doesn't make any sense that they'd wait so long to attack."

I thought their cries outside sounded more now like breakers crashing against a cove.

I could also see in the distance a windstorm at last skulking from the foothills of the mountains, beginning to circle like a beast certain of its kill.

"Wouldn't trying to get in touch with them first — wouldn't that, Cal, be the *human* thing to do?"

"Those aren't neat little legends out there, Alterra. They're — reality."

Her reflection seemed etched into the glass, making her appear to be considerably older.

That would have been that if we hadn't realized then that we had company.

One of the monitors bleated — then another — and another.

This time they were everywhere!

The interesting thing was that they made no secret of it. They advanced slowly from the west, spinning above the fields on layers of a yellow-green cloud.

When they were close enough, I isolated one and switched on the telefocus.

The coils we had noticed before were external tubes of a scabrous substance that wound around the entire length of the being, making it resemble a kind of bulging caduceus. All the easier, I figured, for boring through the underground that had once been its home. Appendages wavered at its tapered top and bottom, issuing out that sickly yellow gas. The light at its very center pulsated in a tight whirlwind of gases — a kind of heart, I presumed.

I flipped the monitor to spectrographic mode.

This creature processed minerals it assimilated through its bottommost appendage, apparently whenever it touched the ground. It fed off salt and expelled chlorine. That explained the quantities of chlorine that issued from the chasms when the engineers had split apart the asteroid's crust. It also explained why I was not about to invite this fellow to dinner.

I jockeyed the camera to another creature.

Curiously, that one seemed to feed off potassium salt rather than sodium chloride, an adaptation planetologists may have forced upon it in reducing the asteroid's surface salt in favor of the potassium-laden fertilizers shipped in to this region.

Alterra made a face at the close-ups but otherwise said nothing.

The windstorm was still keeping its distance when the explosions started up again.

I taped everything, hoping to close in on the nature of their weapons.

I caught one explosion on film and replayed it. It looked like the Cerean hadn't been carrying anything when it stopped to stand upright and suddenly blew apart.

The bombs had to be unusually small. What was hard to believe was how

this Cerean could have been so clumsy.

Alterra rubbed her bottom lip.

I was thinking about the paraglobe, but I knew that was the farthest thing from her mind.

The explosions were getting closer to the force-field fence.

I made a fist with one hand. Should we give up and just make a run for the paraglobe?

Alterra stopped me with eyes as blue as ice crystals.

"There's something else at work here," she said. "They don't mean us harm, not intentionally. I can tell you're thinking the same thing, Cal."

"We can't take any chances. If we lose the paraglobe —"

Alterra scanned the central chamber of the dome, then paused at the port-hole, an arm propped against the wall. "This is our only chance to make the friends we need," she said.

In that moment I wondered just how wise it had been to raise her here so isolated away from our own kind. But hadn't Prospero tried to do the same thing with his daughter Miranda in that ancient play? Yes, I thought, but he failed, too.

An explosion made the field fence crackle and flare at one point. That made up my mind. "Let's talk about this at the paraglobe."

She let me grab her hand and drag her out the entry shell.

"Just a minute." She paused long enough to break off a sunflower blossom from her garden. When she looked back at me, her cheeks seemed raw. I caught hold of her again, and we scrambled for the landing site.

Crowds of Cereans lined up along the force field. Some of them were already breaking through — and there were strangely no explosions as they hovered in toward us.

I yanked out my beamer.

She let go of my hand. Her eyes flashed the starlike gold of the sentry lights. She backed away. "I have to try, Cal."

I realized then the extent of the changes we had both undergone here in a world that was itself still changing. We were alike because she had come from me — but she was someone else now, someone separate from me, because she still had a part of me I had lost in having her.

I gritted my teeth.

All we could see were the lights of the creatures at first, approaching like will-o'-the-wisps. Their outlines shadowed forth as they made a curious soughing sound, then they burst into the sentry lights.

"All right," I said. "I'll come, too."

She just shook her head.

I leveled my beamer and swallowed hard. "Just don't get any closer than you need to." I switched off the force field around the paraglobe. We wouldn't have much time.

I let my beamer flash only its sighting light, freezing the creatures in a dis-

torted white cone. They spun like teetering tops toward Alterra.

She raised both hands, one still holding the sunflower. She was trembling.

The slithering of the approaching windstorm was growing louder.

Alterra had wisely stopped before I called her to do at least that much.

One Cerean rotated near her tentatively, an odd strategy for an adversary.

Could Alterra be right?

Then from nearby another flashed completely out of existence in an insubstantial puff that reddened the air to one side of Alterra's body.

I crouched, ready to fire.

How could so many be so inept with their own bombs?

Then another possibility spiraled into my mind as the wind sifted across the potassium-rich soil.

Some of these creatures now subsisted on potassium salt. They still exhaled chlorine gas — but how exactly did they interrelate with this new ecosystem? Was it possible that their own *bodies* now processed this new salt into *potassium* chlorate? Could that substance on those rocks have been something they merely *excreted* now? Because of what we had done to their world to make it ours, what had once been the harmless sodium chlorate was now potassium chlorate? If this were true, they had only to touch organic substances now on the ground to explode! Or to touch —

I shouted into the gusting wind. "Alterra! Come *back*!"

I moved my beamer across her. Her hair seemed to float firelike in the flashing as she turned. "You see, Cal? They're just curious — and as shy as little children! They want only what we do — the touch of someone else!"

She reached out for that one with the hand that held her sunflower.

I thought only of the organic urea she secreted from the palm of her hand.

I pushed forward, stiff-arming the air as I tried to scare off the creatures. I started to fire. There wasn't time even for that.

The explosion hurtled me back against the paraglobe.

Shattered stars clawed up uselessly in petal-like rays toward the violent twinkling of the other stars — the way one of my own hands did. ●

TRUNCATION

Imagine if all stars were faint as the sun
and we would dream under a near-blank sky
just the dog-on-a-leash planets
an art-deco silver moon
and nothing to navigate by

— John Devin

BERLITZ IN OUTER SPACE: How Alien Communication Just Might Work

by Sheila Finch

SCIENCE ESSAY

Sheila Finch currently teaches creative writing and science fiction at El Camino Community College. Besides writing and teaching fiction, Sheila enjoys researching the topics of language and xenolinguistics, which have influenced her novel Triad and the story "Babel Interface," which begins on page 76 in this issue of Amazing® Stories.

"Don't worry, Jim; the aliens all speak English!"

Contrary to the impression given by some of the *Star Trek* episodes, a device such as the universal translator won't solve the problem of talking to the slime mold of Alpha Centauri. For one thing, who's going to program this marvelous device the very first time? And we'd better not stake too much on telepathy, the solution wistfully offered by much Hollywood sci-fi. It may well turn out that talking to the aliens — any meaningful communication, that is, beyond the level of "Me Tarzan, you Jane" — is impossible. But since rising to the challenge of the apparently impossible seems to be one of the things that make us human, let's consider the situation that may face the would-be xenolinguist in the twenty-first century.

Xenolinguistics 101

Oral forms of language such as humans use are probably not the only methods of communication to be found around the galaxy. They aren't the only forms used on our own planet. Consider the intricate dance the bee uses to say "good source of pollen in the river meadow," or the complex daily bulletins the dog reads with its nose, "new, large male in the neighborhood; feisty, too." We ourselves use gestures and expressions to add to what is being communicated, subtle movements of hand or face that may mean one thing in one country, and the exact opposite once we cross the border. And then there's the language of the deaf, Ameslan. Our student xenolinguist will have to become competent in many forms of communication.

But it's possible that we are nature's best attempt at a language-making animal, just as a bee is an example of a honey-making animal. Lewis Thomas notes that we make language compulsively and continuously, and speculates that it's language that makes us human rather than the other way around. We love to talk. We often go to great lengths to bridge the gap when a partner in an information exchange isn't as skillful as we are. "Does Fido want to go walkies?" we enquire. "No? Oh, he wants a dog biscuit, doesn't

he?" Our need to communicate is automatic and instinctive. We're good at what we do.

So we can assume our student will do well enough in the different modes of communication of basic, concrete ideas to move on to the consideration of a few other factors that affect language making. One of these is sentience: self-awareness. This may be the ingredient that distinguishes true language from the information systems used by intelligent, but not self-aware, lower animals. The alien creature that rushes up, tail wagging and tongue lolling out its jaw, may be pleased to see us, but we'll get a lot farther if we can decide fairly quickly if it's the master of the house or just the mastiff. Our busy xenolinguist won't need to waste time on nonsentient life forms.

But how will we know the alien is sentient when we see it, a person and not a pet? Obviously, we dare not make too many anthropomorphic decisions if we want to survive. In fact, it may be that the closer the aliens resemble us or something we recognize as an intelligent terrestrial animal, the more difficulty we'll have getting beyond our preconceptions to genuine communication. (We can imagine also the xenolawyers breathing down our xenolinguist's neck, anxious to know if their clients can harvest the slime mold or teach it to do tricks, or whether they'll make a treaty with it.) So many factors, most of them still unknown, go into the manifestation of sentience; we need to come up with some sort of checklist of clues to look out for. One way is to decide that *self-awareness* implies the ability to think of self apart from the rest of the universe, and to do that the alien will need some way to say "I" and "not-I." Another good clue that the fuzzy lump we're faced with is not just the galactic version of a polled Hereford is the ability to contemplate — and worry about — one's continuing existence (not exactly a desirable trait for polled Herefords); thus our fuzzy lump will probably have some form of tense system in its language, including a way to indicate the future.

Unfortunately, these are not absolutes. We can find examples among human cultures that have dispensed with one or the other of these markers of sentience, or at least have developed ingenious ways around the problem that give UN translators nightmares. For instance, what are we to make of the "royal We" — that the Queen of England has problems with separation of self and is therefore not sentient? Other possible clues such as the capacity for logical thought, the ability to suffer pain, physical and mental, the presence or absence of emotion, and so on are even harder to identify. On the final exam in Xenolinguistics 101, the correct answer is to mark *both* "all of the above" and "none of the above."

We'll be on safer ground when we teach our student xenolinguist that physiology affects the way we see the world around us, and thus the languages that we develop. Humans approach their environment bipedally, using opposing thumbs and two eyes that track together to give depth perception. That this has greatly influenced human languages can be readily

seen in the metaphors we use in everyday communication. "That'll come in handy," we say, or "That child's a handful"; we admonish people to "stand on their own two feet," and so on. An extraterrestrial growing up with only minimal variations from the *Homo sapiens* norm — eyes capable of independent tracking, say, or a third hand — will have developed a vastly different view of the universe; less chance for them to believe in one thing at a time when they can plainly see two, or subscribe to the duality of either/or when they do things by threes. With luck, the work John Lilly began with dolphins will bear fruit, and these mammals from a very different environment and with quite different sensing apparatus will serve as friendly tutors in our language schools. (The fact that we can't decipher enough of dolphinese at present to settle the question of sentience in obviously intelligent mammals that share our own planet underlines the general difficulty of this whole undertaking.)

Linguistic relativity and other heavy-duty theories

"All observers are not led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe," Benjamin Whorf said, "unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar, or can in some way be calibrated." I once spent the better part of an hour, back in the days of bra-burning feminism, trying to make some German feminists understand why I thought their language was sexist — condemning them to the status of neuters (*das Fraülein*) unless some man came along and turned them into legitimate females (*die Frau*). They in turn kept giving me grammar lessons on *der/die/das*. Yet English and German are two languages with a common stem. The reasonableness of this linguistic relativity as it may apply to alien forms of intelligence becomes apparant when we consider what kind of world view our dolphin tutor may be trying to impart to our student xenolinguist — obviously not the world as we see it. (Another way to approach this is to imagine the frog guru giving lessons to the tadpole disciples: "If the fly doesn't move, does it still exist?") The central paradox Whorf's hypothesis raises is the problem of the chicken and the egg. Does our perception of "reality" shape our language, or does our language shape the reality that we are able to perceive?

This is indeed a problem, and a few examples taken from English — a fairly flexible and complex language as languages go — may illustrate it for us. Like many Indo-European languages, English takes note of the separation of self and other in a system of nouns and pronouns that perform or cause to be performed the action of a multitude of verbs. "I sing," we say. "You howl." Together, we make music. But who snows? There's no convenient or colloquial way in English to state that a condition known as snowing occurs without using a noun or a pronoun. We are forced to accuse "it" of snowing and raining, of being foggy or humid. (Persian, for instance, says "air" or "the weather" is snowing.) A minor nuisance, surely, but one that under other circumstances contributes to the physicists' aggravation at finding

something in their laboratories that sometimes is "a particle" and sometimes "a wave." Is it the mysterious entity that manifests in two different ways, or does the English language force us to see it that way? And would we fare better as we measure the tracks of the particles in the bubble chamber if we kept our notebooks in Hopi? Our student xenolinguist will have to develop some flexibility in thinking here.

But that's not the end of the problem. English is a language at least formally obsessed with time, especially the past. Consider only how many ways we have of indicating the precise moment of past time in which one event happened or will have happened in a "future past" in relation to another. We pride ourselves on our ability to write complicated phrases such as "he will have been being eaten" — probably by the carnivorous slime mold before he can finish the sentence. We might note at this point that there's a question whether there aren't really two separate things at work here; we could call them "time sense" and "tense systems." They aren't always the same; time markers can appear elsewhere than on the verbs in a sentence, and even languages that possess sophisticated ways to *write* tense differences don't always observe them in speech. Even so: past, present, future, the English language constrains us to accept the flow of time. Which, Albert Einstein said, is only a stubbornly persistent illusion.

So it will be well for our xenolinguist to have other human languages ready for use besides English. Slime-moldese may translate better into Navajo; fuzzy lumps may communicate their wisdom with less trouble in Persian. Jonathan V. Post has gone a step farther, putting forward the intriguing idea that our first xenolinguists will need to be poets, for only in poetry do we find the vehicle for the expression of the meeting ground between the conscious and unconscious elements of the mind, the individual and the universal, the self-referential, metalanguage, commenting on the workings of mind itself.

Another linguist whose work has been seminal for xenolinguistics is Noam Chomsky. The aptly (we hope!) named theory of Universal Grammar suggests that human brains are hard-wired for some basics in language. The baby is seen in this theory as ready to recognize and "plug in" certain units of speech, no matter what language mama presents them in. For instance, as far as human languages are concerned, we can see that all people recognize two basic experiences, that of "actor" and "undergoer." Thus the infant can be expected to handle "Baby eat banana" fairly easily, understanding which is eater and which is eaten, and soon he will modify it to reflect other needs: "Baby eat cookie," or growing sophistication: "Baby eat prime rib and drink Dom Perignon." We can also identify the modes of ordering or expressing these basic experiences: we can make assertions, state negatively, form questions, issue commands, wish, request, or promise. All human languages possess the capacity to do some of these transactions; many do all of them. Everything else is a matter of embroidery. None of our languages have

found any other type of thing to say about the baby and the banana.

But what if an alien language possesses another transaction? Our xenolinguist won't even know one has been used because to perceive it necessarily implies that we have it, in some human language — something Benjamin Whorf would understand. If Chomsky's terminology was inspired, and Universal Grammar turns out to be genuinely universal, we're in luck. On the other hand, the possibility exists that the concept only reveals the limitations of our very human brains. It may be, as J. B. S. Haldane said of the universe, that these alien languages are not only queerer than we imagine, but queerer than we *can* imagine.

As a footnote to this discussion of linguistic theories, we should make mention of the research being done in Artificial Intelligence, for what we learn from teaching a machine to use language, and recognizing if and when sentience has developed in our creation, will be vastly useful to the infant science of xenolinguistics. In this context, Marvin Minsky proposes three basic conditions — objects, causes, goals — that we should set beside the notions of actor and undergoer as possible keys into alien languages. Surely, if they inhabit the same universe as we do, the slime mold and the fuzzy lumps will recognize objects, understand causes, and have goals? Perhaps the test Alan Turing suggested for machine sentience will be useful here, too, and we'll accept aliens as *being* sentient if they can *convince* us they are.

At first glance it would seem highly probable that beings subject to the same laws of gravitation and electromagnetism and so on would have rather similar ways of explaining their surroundings, ways we can exploit in one human language or another. At the very least, we ought to be able to communicate in the language of mathematics. Surely that's a constant?

“With a little help from my friends”

Consider now our beleaguered xenolinguist on Alpha Centauri, where the beings that have developed are nothing like Earth mammals. The world too is very different from our own small, friendly globe. Things may not be what they seem: the aliens, sharing a hive-mind, have no sense of the separation of self and other; the concepts “actor” and “undergoer” won't exist for them. Nor do they count beyond “all” and “less than all.” Without well-defined topological features in the sluggish sea that covers their planet, our aliens won't recognize “objects” as such; this will hinder the development of arithmetic. They have no sense of time's flow, living in a timeless Now; thus they don't recognize Minsky's causes or goals.

What's to be done? How will our xenolinguist ever break the language barrier?

One answer is to say that if these aliens don't build anything, then they aren't sentient. But by this standard the sage of the Himalayan mountaintop doesn't produce much concrete evidence of sentience either.

Normally, we may suppose the xenolinguist has a daily routine not that

different from the one followed by Earth-bound linguists. First, we need to amass language samples, using electronic recording equipment, and sort out phonemes and morphemes (no easy task at that). If we're nervous or can't survive the alien atmosphere, we'll send down automated probes to do the work for us while we orbit in relative safety above. But eventually we'll understand the differences between the alien versions of g-o-d and d-o-g. Next, we'll utilize computers to catalog our findings and search out patterns that combine, transform, and expand the meanings we're identifying. It will help here if our xenolinguist has a computer link implanted in her brain for high-speed processing of such vocabulary and grammatical items. Then comes trial and error (an old and effective method — if our xenolinguist doesn't get eaten first) and perhaps ostension, pointing, the "Me Tarzan, you Jane" form of communication. This necessarily won't be an option with the handleless slime mold, but providing the fuzzy lumps don't consider pointing a capital offence, we may advance a little. We'll throw in a few tricks humans employ instinctively when learning languages; at best these result from interpreting a common fund of gestures — body language — to guess at meaning, and at worst they arise from the dubious ground of ESP. These tools will necessarily work even less satisfactorily with alien languages than they do with Earthly ones.

And then we're up against the wall. The environments have nothing in common, the physiological differences are extreme, the life experiences have been too different. The alien minds look at totally different realities. We're going to need a little help from a friend.

Lennon and McCartney knew in the 1960s the value of altering one's perceptions for recreational purposes. It may well become necessary in the next century to chemically alter the human perception of reality in order for a new way of seeing, the alien way, to be available to the xenolinguist. We may find that in order to get along in outer space we need to remember what we've learned about inner space. We know that hallucinogenic drugs such as marijuana, hashish, and LSD alter consciousness, breaking down what we might only half-jokingly call the "consensus illusion of reality," and opening the mind to other ways of seeing. It's possible our experience with recreational drugs may be put to good use in the future by the xenolinguist striving to go beyond basics into the idiosyncratic concepts, the infinite ways the world can be viewed, that lie beneath languages. If this turns out to be true, the xenolinguist will need a variety of such drugs and others we have yet to invent, each one's effects very carefully and precisely mapped and monitored, to approach the alien world view. It will make little difference in the long run whether we achieve this altered world view through chemicals assembled in the lab, hallucinogenic plants gathered on the alien planet, or complex routines of hormone injections to mimic alien endocrinology. Our aim in any case is to so alter the way the environment is apprehended as to make possible an entirely different system of coding experience

of it.

Each xenolinguist will build on the work of those who have gone before, finding a way through the impossible chaos of the universe we are imbedded in. The xenolinguists will have to learn to handle concepts human minds never evolved to handle. They will have to stretch the human language-making ability in ways that are inconceivable to us now. And, like travelers come back from some vast and terrible adventure, they may never be able to find the words in our stunted languages to describe what they have come to know.

It won't be without its dangers, especially at first. Despite precautions, emergency procedures and protocols, some will lose their minds or their lives. In order to overcome the rigidity that sets in with advancing age, and to take advantage of the "language window" in young humans, Suzette Hayden Elgin has suggested that we may have to isolate our xenolinguists at birth to train them efficiently. And then they will lose their humanity.

Nevertheless, we'll rise to the challenge of the impossible. That's what being human means for us. The experience will alter the xenolinguists, and through them, all of us will be changed. If learning another human language can be compared to opening a window on the world, then learning an alien language may open the door on the universe. We will never be the same again.

And who knows? The diplomats and the tourists, the scientists and the salesmen following hard on the heels of our xenolinguist may indeed be able to buy their tapes from Berlitz for the universal translator after all! ●

PHYSICS 1

"What will I learn here?" you might query.
You'll learn some math and Einstein's theory.
Ask teacher for an illustration.
He'll explain, "It's time dilation.
Length gets less. Mass gets more.
Time decreases. That's the law.
When things go so very, very fast,
classical physics is of the past,
and to find what's really true,
we must seek the physics new.
Learning this is lots of fun,
in our course called Physics 1."

— Morris Liebson

THE WORDS OF THE PROPHETS

by James Park Sloan

art: Terry Lee

James Park Sloan, age 42, teaches modern literature and fiction writing at the University of Illinois at Chicago. He is also a student of financial markets and has a particular interest in the work of Nikolai Kondratieff and R. N. Elliott, whose work on long economic and market cycles proposes a predictive model of the economic future. The author and his 17-year-old son, Eugene, coauthor a regular science-fiction review column in Chicago Tribune Book World.

The author has written three novels, War Games, The Case History of Comrade V., and The Last Cold-War Cowboy. "The Words of the Prophets," however, is the author's first science-fiction short-story sale.

It was the fall before my sixteenth birthday, when I was busy getting ready for CATs. Nobody ever forgets the semester he has CATs, nobody who wants to make anything of himself, anyway. It's like, you sit to be tested for three hours, three days in a row, and when the three days are over, you arise with the whole rest of your life determined.

Well, not quite, I guess. You *are* allowed to petition for a retake if you can demonstrate that you were sick or in some way involuntarily incapacitated by an Act of God. For the most part, though, it all comes down to those three by three hours, and when you come out of it, you are destined for Lyceum, Voctech, or Ojot. I know, I know, there are those who believe you are predestined long before that, but that's the way it seems when you go in to sit for CATs.

And just for that reason, you seem to have a particularly sharp memory for the sights and sounds and smells of that autumn. I remember, for example, the smell of the grape dubbabubba Susan Brown popped during bio-theo, and I can conjure up at will the hot peanuts and cotton candy they hawked at football games. I can hear the *woof woof woof* of the cheers, and I can see the orange and blue crepe bunting that hung in the halls from the first of October to Thanksgiving, and the big orange and blue sign that read: DECK 'EM, DEVILS; TIE DOWN THE TIGERS.

I hated the pep rallies. I hated the way everybody jostled into the auditorium, ignoring the instructions from the teachers, and I hated the way the teachers turned their heads and ignored the pushing and shoving and fighting for seats. I hated the way the football multicaptains got up and said stupid little things like, "We're gonna bust 'em, that's our custom," and I hated

it when their stupid little sayings brought down the house. I would much rather have stayed an extra forty minutes in bio-theo or have gone forty minutes early to Intro to Unified Field Theory.

I know, I know. You're thinking that I was a star in bio-theo, which I was, sort of, and that only a handful of sophyear hotshots got into UFT — a handpicked handful selected by the teachers as most likely to ace the CATs and go on to the Lyceum High Curriculum. That's part of the truth, no doubt about it, but a big part of it was just the bumping and pinching and pinging and ear slapping and shouting that struck everybody, apparently including the teachers, as acceptable behavior for fifteen-year-old children of God.

It's the pep rallies, now, that mainly bring back those days. It was during the pep rally before the Tiger game, you see, that the incredible thing began. I watched until the clock above the door said it was one minute until the bell, and then I asked Sq. Nathan if I could be excused. Normally, a teacher wouldn't think of releasing you one minute before a pep rally. Msq. Versuch had never done it froshyear, but Sq. Nathan was more than an ordinary teacher. Teachers were under pressure to promote school spirit — to attend rallies and ball games and to encourage students to do the same — but Sq. Nathan made no bones of the fact that he thought games and pep rallies were stupid. As far as he was concerned, we were in his class for bio-theo, and the football lunkheads had to dot their *i*'s and cross their *t*'s and get every *a*, *and*, and *the* right just like everybody else.

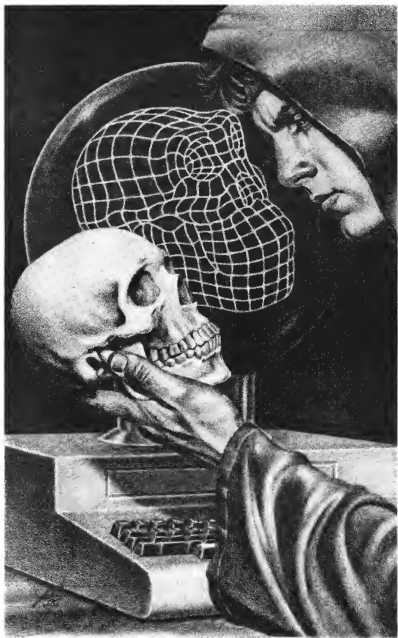
Anyway, Sq. Nathan said okay, so I made my way out of the room as unobtrusively as possible and took the long way around the corridors so I would not have to walk past Sq. Wilder, the hall monitor. I stopped in front of the BOYS and checked to be sure that no one else was in the hall. Then I ducked inside quickly and checked to be sure the BOYS was empty, too. It was. I went straight to the third stall, closed the door, sat down without bothering to unbutton my trousers, and looked to see if the amazing thing was still there.

It was there, all right.

On the upper right-hand corner of the door was the message, GET YOUR KNOB POLISHED, CALL JODY, followed by Jody Fleischmann's telephone number. In the center of the door were two HERE I SIT poems and the assertion that NATHAN SUCKS SLIMY BACTERIOPHAGES, under which someone had appended, BACTERIOPHAGES BITE SLIMY NATHAN. Underneath them was a crude drawing labeled SUSAN BROWN'S EQUIPMENT, which interested me more than I liked to admit. But the amazing thing was written on a slanting line beginning just above Susan Brown's left breast:

ALL LIVING THINGS, INCLUDING HUMAN BEINGS, EVOLVED
FROM LOWER FORMS OF LIFE.

It was in small block letters, printed not written, but there was something about the strokes that reminded me of the long rambling comments that Sq.



Nathan put at the bottom and in the margins of my bio-theo papers. I stared at it for a long time. I had been thinking what to do about it.

It was mischief, all right. Far worse mischief than Susan Brown's equipment. Worse than painting the Tigers' goal posts and stealing their cheerleader uniforms. Worse even than the boy who set off the stink bomb in chem-theo lab. I had spent most of the evening before thinking about what I was going to do about it, but it still made the back of my neck tingle. It was like taking the CATs. One small step across an imaginary line, and your whole life could change.

I took out the pencil I carried in my shoe and wrote in small, neat block letters:

HOW CAN THAT BE? AND WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY
"EVOLVED"?

I had just dotted the second querule when I heard the door swing open. There were footsteps, a silence, and then the sound of a urinal flushing. There were hand-washing sounds, then silence.

"Who's that in the stall?"

"It's . . ." My voice betrayed me with an adolescent squeak. "It's Donnie Snelgrove," I managed to get it out.

"Are you ill, boy?" It was Sq. Wilder.

"I'm okay," I said.

"Come on out, then," Sq. Wilder said. "Doesn't do to have boys skulking around in toilet stalls, does it? On top of which, you're missing the pep rally."

"Yes, sir," I said. Then I did the thing that showed the halfway presence of mind you have at fifteen. I pulled my zipper halfway down and then up again in a single stroke. I waited a full rest as if buttoning up my trousers and rebuckling my belt.

"Tuck it in good, boy," Sq. Wilder said. "It's football you're supposed to be excited about today, not Susie Brown's boobs."

Which made it perfectly natural for me to come stumbling out of the stall with a guilty look on my face. I was already out the door before I realized that I still had the pencil in my hand.

For the rest of the day I couldn't get that pencil out of my mind. I thought about it all through Msq. Whitford's lecture in Unified Field Theory. It didn't matter much because she always started by repeating the basic principles before going on to introduce new material, which happened to be the specific case of histo-theo. We could keep going over the material for two or three weeks until even the slowest learners had the gist of it.

"Amazingly enough," Msq. Whitford began, "there was a time, and a recent one at that, when all branches of knowledge were regarded as separate. They were as branches unsupported by a trunk. Could a trunkless tree survive?"

"No, Msq. Whitford," the class responded in unison.

"In the time of the Great Robertson, all of this began to change," Msq. Whitford continued. "The Great Robertson began the work which pulled back together the branches of learning which had come apart. Areas of study which had existed as homeless orphans were now rejoined to take their rightful place in the grand symmetry. The study of numbers and their relationships, which had existed through the Dark Age as the bastard child mathematics, now took its rightful place in the grand summa as mathematical theology. What is mathematical theology?"

"Mathematical theology is the set of principles designed by God to express with perfect beauty and symmetry the quantitative relationships between things," the class replied in unison. A few students, unsure of themselves, moved their mouths silently. "As such, mathematical theology is the expression of God's perfection in numbers."

"Very good," Msq. Whitford said. "And in the same manner, the study of living things, which had sunk to the level of a practical art, beset by numerous myths and superstitions, was restored to its niche as biological theology. What is biological theology?"

"Biological theology is the design chosen by God to express his own perfection in the multifoliate forms of living things. It is the study of his living material handiwork, complete, willed, and perfect in its beauty and its order."

"Very good, very good," Msq. Whitford said. "And now, as today's topic, we shall take up the study of all recorded human events, a study pursued in the Dark Ages as a random accumulation of arbitrary fact unenlightened by comprehensive pattern of interpretation. For, indeed, human affairs are not to be understood without reference to teleology, which is to say, to that divine purpose which makes sense of the apparently random and meaningless. In the aftermath of the work of the Great Founders, we can once again see pattern and meaning in the rich tapestry of human affairs. We see, in short, that history, now as always, is, in truth, His Story."

I could barely wait until open ninth to check the stall again. Sq. Nathan had seventh open, and if, as I suspected, he was the source, there would have been time for an addition. I burst in quickly, this time taking care to unzip and unbuckle. The first two messages were still there, and written below them in immature hand:

QUEERS ASK QUESTIONS
QUEERS USE QUERULES
QUEERS DIE.

I felt an electric jolt run through my chest. I was ready to burst out the door when I saw the faint penciled message:

SPORTSPIELLENPLATZ NUMMER DREI.

The third stall of the athletic lockers, or so I understood it. It said so much, but also a great deal more. It said that whoever left the first message

knew theological German, at least, and suspected that whoever answered also had at least an introductory acquaintance. He — for it had to be “he” — was also a person with access to the athletic lockers, thus a Bigsquare, and he had been clever enough to work it out that the locker stalls were one of the safest places — being covered, despite all efforts by maintenance, with HERE I SIT poems and the breasts of the Susan Browns and Jody Fleischmanns.

It also suggested, which I had barely dared to hope, that the initial message was more than a personal anti-theo outburst. It was an invitation to dialogue. Putting it all together, as I rubbed out the German words, I began to entertain the possibility that the message was intended specifically for *me*.

That evening I had Msq. Worthy’s Basic CAT Prep class. Msq. Worthy was known to everyone as one of the good Mizquares of the community, given to good works, regular in devotion, and able to recite long passages from the Bible flawlessly. Her prep course was considered indispensable to those who wanted to ace the Basic CAT — that is, not only to recite it correctly, questions and answers, every *a*, *and*, and *the*, but also with feeling and proper expression and without hesitation or pauses. For this service, the parents of potential scholars were willing to pay her a good fee, which was described, however, as an offering.

She began, as always, by explaining that the Basic CAT, as students called it, was in fact The Shorter Catechism adopted by the Westminster Assembly in the year 1643, at the very beginning of the Great Dark Age. Given to man by divine guidance, it had been held sacred and inviolate through “dungeon, fire, and sword,” and had been transmitted intact to the New Faithful. Her method was to assemble four or five young scholars in her devotion parlor and ask the questions in order, start to finish.

There was the usual jostling for the left end of the sofa, which always got the first and easiest question. I accepted the far right, next to Susan Brown.

“Let us vary our procedure tonight as the Lord Himself made various his Creation,” Msq. Worthy began. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Ruffy Higgins squirm. “First, Donald. Question number one.”

“Question number one,” I said. “What is the chief end of man? Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.”

“Very good, Donald,” she said. “And now, Susan. Question number two.”

“Question number two,” Susan repeated. “What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him? The Word of God contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.”

“Which is,” Msq. Worthy snapped. “The Word of God, *which is*, contained in the Old and New Testaments. When you omit *which is*, you leave out the virgules and inject an implicit querule as to whether the Word of

God might be contained elsewhere than the Scriptures. You miss the two pauses. You do not speak with proper inflection and feeling. This is why attention to the precise wording is important."

She had spoken without recourse to the Catechism itself, which lay unopened in her lap throughout the entire session. It was a neat trick. From Susan, she moved on to Horace Benbow for question number three, and then to Ruffy Higgins for question number four.

"Question number four," Ruffy repeated. "What is God? God is . . . God is a . . . I don't know."

"Donald, help him please," she snapped.

"Question number four: What is God?" I responded. "God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth."

That threw both Horace and Ruffy off. You were supposed to prepare thirty-two questions, but if you knew how many were coming, and if you were pretty sure where you would sit on the sofa, you only had to prepare every fourth question. Neither Horace nor Ruffy had any notion how many persons there were in the Godhead, and Msq. Worthy looked daggers at them again as they came acropper on the decrees of God. That was how I happened to get question number nine.

"Question number nine," I echoed weakly. "What is the work of creation?" And suddenly I faltered. I felt light-headed, dizzy. The dim Bible-reading lamp seemed to penetrate my very skull.

"Yes, Donald," Msq. Worthy prompted. "The work of creation is . . . ?"

The only words I could recall were the words that had been written in tiny print just above the paper dispenser in the third locker room toilet stall. I had committed them to memory:

EVOLUTION PROCEEDS BY NATURAL SELECTION. WITHIN LARGE POPULATIONS OF A SINGLE SPECIES, THE BETTER-ADAPTED INDIVIDUALS ARE MORE LIKELY TO SURVIVE TO REPRODUCE. THE OFFSPRING ARE THEREFORE SELECTED FOR TRAITS HAVING SURVIVAL VALUE — THE WINGS OF BIRDS, FOR EXAMPLE, THE SWIFTNESS OF THE ANTELOPE, OR THE INTELLIGENCE OF A HUMAN BEING.

"Are you ill, Donald?" Msq. Worthy inquired. "I had thought you a promising scholar. It is unlike you to come unprepared."

"Question number nine," I repeated softly. "What is the work of creation? The work of creation is God's making all things of nothing, by the word of his power, in the space of six days, and all very good."

The next morning I arrived at school before the buses to see if there was an answer to my question. I had written behind the chrome-plated fixtures:

YES, I HAVE HEARD THAT SOME HERETICS ONCE HELD WITH AN "EVOLUTIONARY MODEL," BUT IT IS LONG DISCREDITED.

HOW CAN I BELIEVE WHAT YOU WRITE WHEN THE BIO-THEO BOOK SAYS OTHERWISE?

My question had been rubbed out, and the reply was written in the shadow of the door bolt:

YOU MUST LEARN TO DISTRUST BOOKS. BE SKEPTICAL OF ARGUMENT WHICH IS SUPPORTED ONLY BY AUTHORITY. EXAMINE THE EVIDENCE.

I rubbed it out quickly and replaced it with two words:

WHAT EVIDENCE?

At gym and again at break my words were still there. That made sense because Sq. Nathan had not yet had his own break. At lunch, however, my writing had been rubbed out, but it looked as if someone had begun a reply and been interrupted in the middle. The first words were rubbed out. I resisted the temptation to run down during open ninth and check again. Instead I waited for final bell and found the response:

FOSSIL EVIDENCE, TO BEGIN WITH. THE REMAINS OF BEINGS NO LONGER IN EXISTENCE WHICH APPEAR TO BE STEPS IN THE PATH TOWARD PRESENT FORMS. OBSERVATIONS OF CURRENT SPECIES, SUCH AS FOWL WHOSE COLORATION HAS CHANGED PROTECTIVE MIMICRY WITH THE DETERIORATION OF THE VEGETATIVE BASE. BUT MOST DECISIVE AND DEFINITIVE IS THE MECHANISM (EXPRESSED BY A WIZARD NAMED CRICK: DNA GOES TO RNA, RNA NEVER GOES TO DNA). INSIDE THE CELL ITSELF IS THE MECHANISM BY WHICH INFORMATION IS TRANSMITTED DETERMINING THE CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIVIDUAL AND SPECIES. CELLS TRANSMIT INFORMATION. I AM CONCERNED THAT THIS DIALOGUE IS BECOMING DANGEROUS FOR YOU.

I wrote back:

I DON'T UNDERSTAND. I HAVE NO ACCESS TO FOSSIL EVIDENCE. I HAVE NO ACCESS TO THE INFORMATION CONTAINED INSIDE A CELL. HOW DO I KNOW?

There was no answer the next day, or the next. The day after that was Saturday, and the Devils beat the Tigers 20-14. It kept the winning streak intact and meant that there would be a mighty pep rally the following Tuesday. On Sunday, I went to morning and evening services, Sunday prayer school, prayer meeting, and CAT prep class. On Monday morning, I beat the buses to school again, and the message was waiting:

THERE ARE STILL BOOKS AVAILABLE IN LARGE LIBRARIES — WIDENER, I HAVE HEARD, WHICH YOU MAY SOME DAY USE IF YOU MAKE IT THROUGH LYCEUM HIGH CURRICULUM — AND ALSO IN PRIVATE COLLECTIONS.

I sat with my head on my fist. It was an answer, but it was no answer at all.

Finally, I wrote:

YOU SAID THAT I WAS NOT TO TRUST BOOKS.

That day in bio-theo we were studying viruses. Sq. Nathan rapped for attention, and the catechesis began.

"What is a virus?" he asked.

I raised my hand. "A virus is a microscopic organism, highly efficient in design and function, existing at the border between living and nonliving, and capable of imparting illness to human beings and other animals. Viruses have frequently been the instrument of God for punishing the iniquitous or testing the faithful."

"Very good, Donald," Sq. Nathan said, but Ruffy Higgins's hand was up.

"If God wishes to punish the iniquitous or test the faithful, why does he require the agency of a virus?"

"Why, Ruffy, that's an interesting question," Sq. Nathan said thoughtfully. "We must only assume that God preferred the agency of a virus as part of the perfection of His beautiful and multifoliate plan."

"How do *you* know what God prefers?" Ruffy snorted.

"And what's this about the border between living and nonliving?" Horace Benbow wanted to know. "God created things living and things inanimate. How can there be a border between them?"

"It is orthodox doctrine," Sq. Nathan responded.

"Why does God wish to punish animals?" Jody Fleischmann chipped in. "It doesn't seem fair to punish animals."

"God's sense of fair is not the same as our own, Jody," Sq. Nathan parried.

"But isn't it correct doctrine that the 'virus model' is in error?" It was the deep voice of Hsq. Anderson, the administrator. He was standing in the doorway with Sq. Wilder. "I understand that the best current thought holds that the virus theory is redundant, thus heretical, and that the Supreme Maker punished the wicked by a pure and perfectly realized act of His Will."

"But that view itself is heresy," Sq. Nathan replied. "That is, I believe it is heresy."

"Then you should examine the latest deliberations of the synod, Sq. Nathan," Hsq. Anderson said. "You would do well to familiarize yourself with them lest you fall into heresy yourself. Carry on."

As Hsq. Anderson and Sq. Wilder walked away, I saw Ruffy and Horace and Jody touch hands for a low five underneath their desks.

YOU MUST MAKE CHOICES BETWEEN BOOKS.

I stared back at the sentence which peeped up faintly through the flyspeck design of the tiles. I wrote my response in long flat letters just above the lower margin of the stall wall. It took up the better part of both walls:

BUT ON WHAT BASIS DOES ONE CHOOSE? MUST ONE

CHOOSE THE BOOK WHICH IS FOLLOWED BY THE GREATEST NUMBER? BY THOSE WHO ARE POWERFUL AND SUCCESSFUL? BY THOSE ONE HAPPENS TO KNOW AND RESPECT? DOES ONE CHOOSE AN ELOQUENT BOOK, OR A BOOK WHOSE MODEST HOMELINESS MAY CONCEAL PROFOUND TRUTH? IT SEEMS AN IMPOSSIBLE QUESTION. BEWARE! SOMEBODY PUT RUFFY, HORACE, AND JODY UP TO IT. YOU ARE IN TROUBLE. BETTER TO WRITE NO MORE.

I didn't dare go again that day. It was far too dangerous, and people were certain to begin noticing the pattern. I waited until the next morning and found the message on a thin line at the top of the stall — careless, I thought. A location much too like that of my own previous message:

YOUR QUESTION IS A DIFFICULT ONE. IT HAS TROUBLED ME ALSO. ALL I KNOW IS THIS: ONE MUST ATTEND TO AN INNER VOICE. THERE MUST BE A HARMONIOUS ACCORD BETWEEN WHAT ONE FEELS INSIDE AND WHAT ONE SEES IN THE OUTER WORLD. THERE IS DANGER. LIKE CELL AND SPECIES, ONE MUST LIVE IN ORDER TO REPRODUCE AND TRANSMIT INFORMATION.

It was insane. I was dumbstruck. I erased rapidly, then wrote in white heat:

THIS IS NO ANSWER AT ALL. YOU ARE SAYING THAT YOUR TRUTH IS SIMPLY A VISION. ANOTHER REVELATION!

That day in bio-theo, Sq. Nathan read us the latest dispensation on viral illness from the synod assembly. With mournful face, he informed us that henceforward the term "viral illness" was to be regarded as nominal rather than descriptive. The term "virus" was to be regarded as archaic. At the end of the forty minutes, Hsq. Anderson appeared at the head of the class and informed us that Sq. Nathan had been called elsewhere and would no longer be teaching us. A new bio-theo teacher would arrive within the week.

On the way to the pep rally, I was intercepted by Sq. Wilder and ordered to report to the social worker. I was to attend the pep rally first, however.

Instead, I ran as fast as I could to see the answer before they thought to erase it. I raced down the long corridors, across the basketball floor, and into the locker room. I swept through the door and bolted into the third stall.

The walls were newly washed and purged of all HERE I SIT poems and pictures. A single message had been left in bright red marker:

BUT MY DEAR BOY, HAVE YOU LEARNED NOTHING? WHAT BENEFIT WOULD A BIRD DERIVE FROM HALF A WING?

I heard the laughter of Sq. Wilder from the locker room door.

It all happened the year that I was scheduled to take CATs, the year of my breakdown. It could have ruined my life, but I was one of the lucky ones. I pled incapacitation and magisterial malpractice, and after a series of hear-

ings I was allowed to take the CATs in February. I passed with highest honors. Or as Sq. Nathan would have put it, I adapted and survived.

It comes back now because the Devils are playing the Tigers this week. There is a smell of cotton candy and hot peanuts in the autumn air, and I watch the jostling and poking of my students with a good deal more benevolent tolerance than I once mustered for the pep rallies. Susan no longer pops grape dubbabubba, but our daughter does, and that flavor brings back its memories, too.

As Sq. Nathan suspected, it was my God-given destiny to become a transmitter of information — a Bigsquare, a Monitor, and now by grace of the Southeastern Synod in Consideration Assembled, an Honored Scholar.

As for the evolution of men from lower beings, I have nothing to say on that subject. It is not within the purview of my call to speak on that topic, any more than one can speak with authority concerning the real or nominal nature of a virus. Yet I suspect that the days when man can again so speak are not too far in the future. I can feel a new spirit of inquiry afoot in the land — have felt it, indeed, since about the tenth year of the time when the machines began to break down.

But that is not my subject. My subject has ever been that last unanswered question: WHAT IS IT GIVEN TO MAN TO KNOW? And its corollary: HOW DOES MAN KNOW THE THINGS HE KNOWS? Nor do I have any answers, although in my early paper now occasionally cited by others, I made my modest proposition: MAN MUST LOOK OUTWARD TO THE WORLD AND INWARD TO HIS OWN DIM LIGHT AND CHOOSE THE SIMPLEST *REASONABLE* EXPLANATION OF GOD'S WORKS. I am told that it has gained a certain currency among scholars and practical students of Scientific Theology. I have also heard that some refer to it as Snelgrove's Razor. ●

THE MOON AGAIN

There's the Moon,

Old as hell,

Dry as *Dune*,

Cold as well.

It never had its own intelligent life, or forests,

Or building towers.

It does have footprints left there by a departed race.

They are ours.

— Frederik Pohl



Exhibit

Roger Raupp

Around the age of ten, Roger Raupp started reading the works of Jules Verne and H. G. Wells, and he became hooked on science fiction from that moment. "I remember being haunted for weeks after reading *The War of the Worlds*," he informs us. "Later, in my teens, I was drawn to fantasy. For several years I lived and breathed Tolkien. I even became the local encyclopedia of Middle Earth facts and trivia."

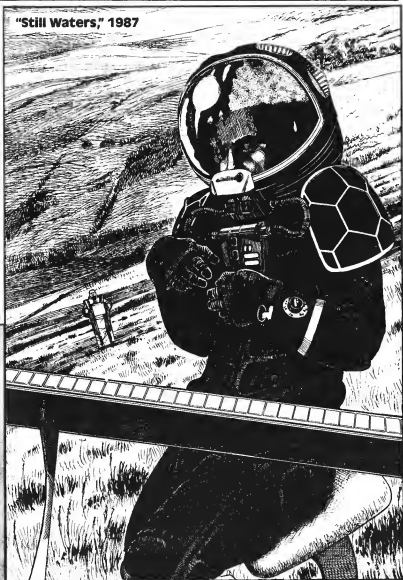
Roger Raupp's artistic education has largely come from teaching himself,

and he was fortunate to begin a professional career at the age of sixteen. While in high school, Roger was invited to prepare some illustrations for a local semi-professional magazine. His work was accepted, and as the magazine reached professional status, so did Roger's illustrations. "My association with a professional publication gave me numerous opportunities to meet other artists, many of whom were much more experienced than I," Roger points out. "I watched these artists work, studied their techniques, and asked questions, thereby managing to acquire professional skills. I don't advocate not attending an art school. I was, however, extremely fortunate to have such resources available to me."

"Stone & Orgone," 1986



"Still Waters," 1987



ON **Exhibit**

Roger Raupp

Of late, Roger has been studying the works and techniques of such master illustrators as Dulac, Doré, Rackam, Mucha, and Waterhouse. "In their work I find a beauty and depth that few of my contemporaries display. I'm hoping to invest similar qualities in my own work," Roger explains. The

"The Witch," 1986



"Ice Worm," 1986



"Childsight," 1986



techniques of illustration that he uses are very much influenced by these elder illustrators. He uses either ink washes or pen and brush for his black-and-white pieces. When preparing color works, he uses either oils or watercolors and paints in the style of the Brandywine School.

In recent years, Roger has become intensely interested in history, both factual and speculative. "I've found that if you dig deep enough, loosen the blinders of contemporary bias, use your own intellect and sensibilities, there's a wealth of inspiration to be found," he claims. "The little-known or -believed events of our world's past tickle my imagination as much as, if not more than, most science fiction or fantasy. Actually, my favorite works of fiction are those that draw upon such inspiration." Roger is currently start-

ing preliminary work on a series of inkings and paintings based on this sort of speculative anthropological information. He plans to release these works as a portfolio of prints.

Roger's artwork has appeared regularly in *Amazing® Stories*, *DRAGON® Magazine*, and *DUNGEON™ Adventures*. A couple of his black-and-white illustrations were recently published in *FANTASTIC™ Stories: Tales of the Weird & Wondrous*. He also contributes to *Breakthrough*, the newsletter/magazine of the Canadian Kate Bush fan club.

Those who are interested in commissions or purchases, or in finding out more about Roger's artwork, can contact him at his studio. Write to: Roger Raupp, 255 Elmwood Avenue, #307B, Lake Geneva WI 53147.

"Forester," 1987



A NEW CHANTEY
by Esther M. Friesner
art: George Barr



Esther informs us that she has a Ph.D. in Spanish from Yale, a husband, two children, and a cat. All but the cat have tried their hands at writing science-fiction stories, which she considers a Pretty Good Thing, as the youngest child is three.

Besides writing short fiction and verse, Esther has had several novels published, her most recent being New York by Knight (Signet, 1986) and The Witchwood Cradle (Avon, 1987). She also received the Romantic Times award for Outstanding New Fantasy Writer of 1986.

The following is dedicated to the members of the cyberprep movement.

Chorus:

*Come all ye good yachtsmen who follow the Cup
That went to the far Aus-tray-lee,
Come down to the dockside and hoist a glass up
And I'll sing a new tale of the sea!
For it's way-hey, twills and tweeds,
The merry-maid sleeps in the cold sea-weeds,
And Lord knows the men she's sleeping with,
But I've got a sweetheart who's going to Smith.*

Oh the wind from the west blew a lightsome breeze
As we cast off the good ship *Sunny*,
And half of the crew had a landlubber's knees
And the rest was all New Money.

[Chorus]

There was Trippy and Chippy and Skippy and me,
And Buffy and Bunny and Bim,
There was Batsy and Fubsy and Biff and DeeCee,
And Thomas (My Gawd! Who asked *him?*).

[Chorus]

We sailed and we sailed our craft out on the Bay,
With nary a thought to the weather,
For God went to Harvard, as some fools may say,
But He's Yale, and we Blues stick together.

[Chorus]

We'd sailed not a league, not a league and three more,
When a wonderous sight met our eyes.
'Twas a lass on the briny, stark bare aft and fore,
With a come-hither look in her eyes.

[Chorus]

This lass had the tail of a whopping great trout,
And the fixings to suckle a nation,
With hair long and gold drifting softly about,
As she made this bizarre declaration:

[Chorus]

"Come down to the sea now, my bonny young men,
"Where the bottom is lousy with gold.
"You may fill up your pockets again and again
"From the treasure chests sunken of old!"

[Chorus]

Alas now, my lads, 'tis said breeding will tell,
And it told more than mortal men know,
For the New Money fellers leapt into the swell
And sank to the bottom below.

[Chorus]

Then the merry-maid smiled as our lads they went down
For the sake of her promised largesse,
And her eyes they were joyous to watch 'em all drown,
But as cold as the old I.R.S.

[Chorus]

She sang a new song: "Oh come into the waves
"If you've a true mariner's thirst!
"For there's vintages ancient in watery graves
"And it's first served the man who dives first!"

[Chorus]

Oh woe for poor Buffy and Skippy and Bun!
They were oenophiles right to the core,
And the thought of rare wines made their brains come undone,
So they plunged to the dark ocean floor.

[Chorus]

Now all the crew left was but Thomas and me,
And Tom's little more'n a fool,
For there's folks Not Our Kind in his family tree
And he prepped at a public high school.

[Chorus]

The merry-maid gave us the wickedest grin
And wiggled and bounced what she'd got.

Poor Tom he just gaped, then the moron dove in,
And I was the last of the lot.

[Chorus]

For the rest of that day she kept trying for me
Using all of her ichthyous charm
'Til I cocked back my head and just happened to see
That the sun was above the yardarm.

[Chorus]

So for cocktails we broke, and I mixed G&Ts.
(The merry-maid drank six of them.)
We talked Politics, Art, and the dreaded Price Freeze,
And I warned her, "Don't buy I.B.M."

[Chorus]

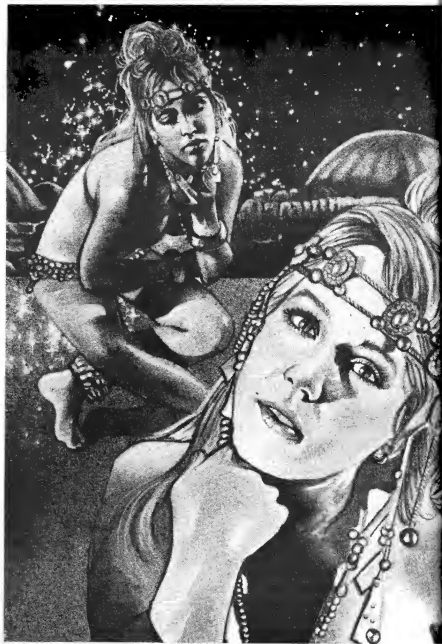
"What! Do you know The Market?" the merry-maid cried.
"So I do. Would you like a hot tip?"
She swam just a little too close to the side
And I hauled the wench into my ship!

[Chorus]

Oh, I showed her at Mystic and Groton and Lyme,
And we just made the six o'clock news,
Then I carted her home, where she now spends her time
Adding zest to my indoor Jacuzzi'.

[Chorus]

So hark to me, sailors! (And merry-maids, too.)
Learn a lesson my comrades learned late:
In life as in fishing there's nowt ye can't do
If ye know how to use the right bait.





BABEL INTERFACE
by Sheila Finch
art: John Lakey

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He was drowning in sound. So many years of alien tongues — nasal, guttural, sibilant. The cacophony of languages in the tavern washed over him till he slid beneath its surface.

His last assignment, translating a multilanguage legal argument, had worn him down. There'd been a time, years ago, when such polyglot wrangling would have been exhilarating; now it was merely exhausting. And if he thought about what the winners in this war of words had told him they would do to the losers, he would be ill. He pressed his tired fingers to his skull.

"Tomas. More *sojyk*?"

Itaka's blunt-muzzled face swam blurrily over him. Tomas squinted at the green teardrop of the *sojyk* bottle. Somewhere in the brightly lit tavern, glass shattered, a woman shrieked, a man laughed. Tomas's brown fingers crawled sluggishly toward the bottle.

"No, I think not," the large Gai'ekian said. The dark-furred hand withdrew the bottle. "You've had enough already, Lingster!"

The clicks and whistles of Itaka's language, almost as natural to Tomas now as Inglis itself had once been, hurt his ears tonight. He scowled.

"Not drunk. Tired. Just waiting out my time."

Itaka nodded. "Two more days in the Guild, I believe, until your contract expires. But then what, my friend? Have you considered what you'll do without it?"

"I've served my time! Renewing with the Guild is my option as a free man. I choose not to renew."

"You're a lingster, not a man!" the Guild Monitor said contemptuously. "What is such a one without the Guild?"

Long years of training spoke to Tomas — *you have no reaction; you are a channel, a conduit only* — the cold teachings of the Guild that maimed what they saved. Nevertheless, the habit of years still held; he felt emotion draining away. Itaka's contempt rolled harmlessly off him.

"I've enough money to have the link removed. I'll find something else to do."

"Fools can dream!" The Monitor said. He threaded his way through the

crowded tavern, finding other customers among the lingsters and their would-be employers.

Tomas closed his eyes against the painfully bright lighting Gai'ekians preferred indoors, a defiant gesture against the long darkness outside. He sat apart from the rest, an isolation he knew his colleagues attributed to his overgrown sense of superiority. He *was* good — perhaps the best on Gai'ek — but that wasn't the reason. He just couldn't forget the missing faces. The Guild's teachings might prevent emotion, but they couldn't prevent memory.

It was time to leave. On the table before him was a plate of half-consumed scraps; his hands moved automatically, gathering the pieces into a small pouch.

"What're you doing?"

Tomas glanced up at the newcomer. Another young Terran finding sustenance and meaning in the life of the Guild, Tomas thought, and — for the present — still a believer in its goodness. The young man's eyes still burned with the almost religious ecstasy the Guild evoked in a lingster's early years.

The newcomer was staring at the food scraps in Tomas's hands.

"The birds," Tomas said, knowing explanation was useless to one so fervent. "The snow."

The other frowned. "So let them starve! There'll be more. Surely you don't feel emotion for birds?"

Tomas shrugged.

But the young man had already forgotten and spoke in an excited voice. "Have you heard the news? It's reported some princeling murdered his lingster — a renegade of course, outside the Guild — and stole the link! They say he's selling copies for a very high price!"

"Much good may it do him," Tomas said. "What can they do with it? A voyeur's toy — so the wealthy can listen in on each other's thoughts."

The young lingster laughed, his eyes gleaming. "True! Well, the Guild won't be avenged of a renegade. But see how these princelings secretly admire our craft while they make such a show of despising us?"

Tomas opened his mouth to argue, then thought better of it. The young man moved away.

Tomas scrubbed at his eyes, as if the action could erase the nagging pain that in the last few months seemed to have taken up permanent lodging behind his eyeballs. Perhaps he, too, had once felt this fervor, though now he doubted it. The lingster trade was a young man's game, before disillusionment and cynicism weighted one down. He had to get out before it was too late. He was breaking apart from the stress of a lifetime spent building tenuous bridges between alien concepts that had only one thing in common — neither could possibly occur in the other language. Sometimes the pressure was unbearable and a lingster's mind fragmented, caught in the malign vortex of interface. And despite the emergency protocols they learned from

the start, a few even perished — like Mitsuko.

But he wouldn't allow himself to think of Mitsuko.

And that was only the beginning, the normal hazard of the profession. Outside the Federation's tidy, safe jurisdiction things were worse. What unspeakable acts were lingsters even now being engaged to witness and translate? Anything from what would be illegal somewhere to those acts that would be considered diabolical everywhere could be arranged on Gai'ek. Only the Guild's teaching gave protection from the burden of guilt such knowledge laid on a lingster. But the teaching itself exacted a heavy price. Lately, the protection had begun to wear thin for Tomas.

He had to stop this constant rubbing at the wounds of the past. He rose shakily to his feet, wincing at the explosion in his skull as he moved, but the thoughts went on. He'd come to the non-Federation world of Gai'ek because of the rich rewards, but it had almost killed him. He'd been a zombie since Mitsuko's death.

Enough. In two days, the *Kirenyi* would lift off for Shulam 5, a peaceful Federation world. He'd find something else to do.

The heavy winter door of the tavern shuddered, and a Gai'ekian princeling thrust himself inside.

"Monitor!" The newcomer's voice thundered across the din.

Tomas clenched his jaw viciously to quell the fury that even now, three years later, gripped him at the sound of that voice. It was a fury he was forbidden to acknowledge.

Itaka lumbered up, red eyes glinting at the prospect of another commission. "Princeling?"

"I need a lingster, a Terran."

"When, mighty Lord?" Itaka's job depended on his ability to fawn on possible clients while he managed to extract favorable terms for the lingsters in his care. But Mareb was dangerous.

"Immediately!"

"A Terran?" Itaka looked round the bar, his blunt head pulled down toward the barrel chest in concentration. "Aiee, Princeling! The Terrans are already under hire."

All the lingsters were in high demand. Any lingster in the Guild could translate a letter or a shipping bill, a legal notice or a work of art. But only Terrans possessed the vocal apparatus flexible enough to reproduce the sounds of almost every speech in the galaxy. It was a point of pride for the wealthy to hire a Terran, even if any lingster could have done the job.

"In a few days, Princeling —"

Mareb studied the gemstones set into his fingers. "Find me a Terran lingster now. I will pay more than has already been offered."

The discussion had reached the ears of one heavily jeweled patron sitting nearby at a table littered with broken glass and empty bottles. Now Tomas saw the Gai'ekian rise, half-drunk, and lurch unsteadily toward Mareb. In

the long boredom of Gai'ek's dark winters, dueling to the death was a popular sport; princelings often killed each other on far less cause than Mareb had given. Tomas saw the sharp glint of a knife.

But Mareb shrugged and turned his back carelessly on his rival. "Well, Monitor?"

Two lingsters hastily refilled the other princeling's glass with *sojyk* and drew his attention away.

Itaka opened his arms in a gesture of helplessness. His eyes rested briefly on Tomas.

No.

Even if it had been anyone but Mareb, he wouldn't do it. Not for Tomas ever again the torment, the mingled pain and delirium of floating in a daze of drug-induced altered states, where the world views of different cultures flowed together like rainbow-hued oil on the surface of deep water, his only anchor the cold voice of the computer in his brain. He was retiring. He would leave the memories behind — Mitsuko's dark, tear-swollen eyes, her hand in his, her little grave under the snow of Gai'ek —

The inner voice rose, obliterating the treacherous emotions that would put a lingster in jeopardy. But somewhere in his mind, a small, rebellious pain still throbbed.

A nervous rasp crept into Itaka's words. "I have no one, Princeling."

Mareb gripped the Monitor's forearm, and Itaka's male ruff rose in fear. The two large Gai'ekians stared at each other. "I have two days' work," Mareb said. "And I will reward you as no one else can."

There were two points of honor to a Gai'ekian, Tomas knew. Profit was the first.

The Monitor turned again toward Tomas. "Under your contract to the Guild, Tomas Vizcano, even though your account is fully paid up, you have two days' service left to give."

"You can't expect me to work for Mareb!"

"You *must* accept this offer," Itaka reminded him gently, "or forfeit all your accumulated credits. The terms of your contract are explicit."

Arguing was useless. Tomas rose and followed Mareb out of the tavern, glowering at the floor to avoid meeting the Gai'ekian's eyes. Outside, the shriek of icy winds in the planet's winter darkness knifed through his fur jacket, sobering him instantly. Tomas emptied the contents of his pouch on the frozen ground as he walked. Behind him, he was conscious of a flurry of wings and beaks and claws descending on the food crumbs in the snow.

Mareb began to talk, explaining his needs. Tomas forced himself to listen as the Guild taught: without emotion, without judgment. Mareb had engaged a troupe of dancers from some tiny world whose language had no interface with Gai'eki. The lingster's job was to form that interface and program Mareb's computer accordingly. Yet he guessed Mareb had something else in mind. The princeling would not concern himself solely about com-

municating with performers, who, in the manner of their kind, would be off-world again in a very short time, offering little opportunity for a Gai'ekian to make a profit out of them.

Tomas didn't have long to wonder.

"There's a little female in the troupe." Mareb loped up the dark street that led from the tavern to his own extensive compound — part palace, part freight depot — at the edge of the spaceport. "I shall buy that one."

Anger welled in Tomas, despite the teachings. Mareb's business seemed not to have changed over the years. Amongst other things, he ran the largest bordello on a world that offered every possible pleasure of the flesh to every possible race. Mareb's clients had a taste for inflicting pain, and they liked to understand what their victims said. Federation codes didn't hold on Gai'ek.

But the Guild had built its reputation on its ethics of neutrality and secrecy. Guild lingsters could be trusted never to judge or comment on what they were called to do, and never reveal the secrets they were privy to. Without this trust, the Guild couldn't have operated. For more years than he cared to count, he'd relied on the wisdom of the Guild's teaching, never having to think for himself. His job was to translate, not to fret over the use that might be made of the translation. It was a two-edged sword, protecting client and lingster both, for unless he remained neutral, Tomas risked his life. And if he began to judge the morality of what he was called upon to witness, he risked his sanity. This had been Mitsuko's mistake, and Tomas would never forgive Mareb for causing her death.

Hadn't the Guild failed her, too, sending such a gentle being to Mareb to do such despicable work?

Damn the Guild and Mareb both!

He forced himself to push Mitsuko's sad face out of his mind, deflecting and blunting the anguish as the Guild taught. It was his only option if he wanted to get out. He would do what he'd been hired to do and then leave Gai'ek forever.

After a while he was calm again.

"What world are these performers from?" Possibly, he'd already come across their tongue.

"The captain of the ship giving them passage called it Denor."

Tomas had never heard of it. So much the better; there'd be no emotional involvement, no atavistic racial ties or sentimental fantasies to trap him in wrong action.

"What are Denorians like?"

Mareb shrugged; the golden decorations permanently attached to his thick body fur winked in the starlight. "Much like yourself, small Terran."

Which meant very little, Tomas knew, for unless another species possessed resources the Gai'ekians coveted, they were notoriously contemptuous of distinguishing between them.

They arrived at Mareb's house, its gleaming white walls rising out of the snow like an ice sculpture. Mareb barked a command. A sliver of whiteness flowed transparent and warmth beckoned. Tomas followed Mareb inside, the wall blanking again behind them.

The interior of Mareb's private quarters was a riot of color and texture. Brilliant carpets, woven from native lichens, shimmered red and purple; the walls, on which similar organisms formed living art, ran green-blue, spilling into violet. Delicate crystal instruments from a world half a galaxy away crooned as they passed, then fell silent again. Deep chairs stood by carved tables holding golden decanters of *sojyk*. Tomas was used by now to the chromatic opulence of Gai'ekian taste, the unstinting search for novelties to help pass the dreary days of the long winter, but Mareb displayed his wealth in a manner that showed contempt for his rivals.

Tomas thought grimly of his own austere room, the ascetic life a Guild lingster was sworn to, broken only by infrequent celebrations with *sojyk* when he wasn't working. Guild training began early, while a child's "window," that natural ability to learn languages, was still open. The Guild recruited future lingsters from among Earth's poor, who were only too happy to sign away their extra mouths. Tomas, like Mitsuko and most of their colleagues, had spent his life as a servant in the homes of the rich of one race or another. It was small wonder the Gai'ekian princelings despised lingsters as much as they prized their talents.

Envy, like remembered pain, was not an emotion a lingster could afford to indulge. He let it go almost without thought.

They passed through this splendor, reaching the house's commcenter. On a curved wall, a row of holoscreens loomed above a complex bank of controls; pilot lights winked on command terminals, graphic displays glowed and faded, arcane digital strings scrolled busily up flat data screens. This was the nerve center from which Mareb controlled his twin empires of freight and flesh. Tomas found the display of Mareb's technology as overwhelming as the evidence of his wealth elsewhere.

Mareb motioned Tomas to sit while the princeling keyed a series of commands into the computer.

A large screen directly in front of Tomas came alive with color. For a moment Tomas thought its camera eye had focused on a wall of the room they had passed through. Then he realized he was seeing a group of dancers practicing elaborate motions in unison. Mareb's fingers moved again and the holo sharpened. For once, the Gai'ekian had been right: the Denorians were at first glance almost human in appearance, except for the copper-green tint to their long, sinuous limbs, and the metallic grey of their head hair. They had a serpentine grace, their arms and legs moving fluidly. Wisps of colored slave-light followed their movements more lovingly than the most clinging fabric. Their dance was hypnotic, and Tomas, trained to levels of nonverbal communication, felt his senses opening to their subtle

messages. They were obviously well suited as entertainment in a bordello.

Now the camera focused on one individual dancing alone. Tomas studied the copper flash of limbs under the floating rose and sapphire of the slave-lights. Long hair like polished metal obscured the face, but below the hidden features the garment of light curved outward in mounding softness, then swept in to a narrow waist. The hair slid back and golden eyes, oval-slitted like a Terran cat's, stared at him.

"That one," Mareb said.

His gut cramped. He forced himself to remember the Guild's teaching: never allow emotion to color the interface. That had been Mitsuko's weakness. Tomas would remain professional. He'd allow his thoughts to range no farther than this assignment. He'd break through to the Denorian language as fast as possible, program Mareb's computer to continue the job, then board the *Kirenyi* and leave the memories behind forever.

Mareb grinned. "When you're ready, Lingster, thumb this pad."

Alone with the computer, Tomas fed in his secret codes, known only to him and one trusted Guild Monitor for safety, and opened a two-way channel between machine and human brain. A buzz began deep in his skull. Tendrils of machine thought slid coldly through his mind. *For the last time!* he thought, and knew that he would probably miss it. The experience was oceanic, a painful rush of mingled pleasure and danger, like orgasm.

He unstrapped a small case from his belt and removed the tiny vials, considering the drug each contained in turn. The brains of sentient species received a multitude of signals about the matrix of existence they were embedded in, but survival demanded that they normally filter most of the signals out. Then each race invented language to make models of what their brains chose to recognize, and having done so, they were forever prevented from knowing what had been left wordless. This would have been no problem to the xenolinguist if only different languages agreed on their world view. But they did not. The many languages on one planet might all disagree in numerous, untranslatable ways; from planet to planet across the galaxy the babel intensified. The drugs broke down the mind's filters, allowing other perceptions, other world views to form, a necessary step if true communication between languages was to take place.

But it took long years of training for a lingster to be able to perceive the unfiltered universe and not be swept away into insanity. Looking at naked chaos was dangerous, like gazing upon the unveiled face of God. The ascetic, meditative life of the Guild prepared him for this act. And still each time was a new gamble, the one he might not survive. Every lingster could parrot the emergency protocols in his sleep, but the trick was remembering to call on them before it was too late.

Tomas made a selection of small capsules and swallowed them quickly. Almost at once he was aware of the tilting of his viewpoint, a hazing over of what had previously been real and solid, a stinging of sensory cues that a

moment before had lain beneath his conscious awareness. It was as if, blind and deaf from birth, he'd suddenly been restored to the world of vision and sound and could make no sense of the confusion that surrounded him. Through the chaos came the cold trickle of the computer's analysis, coding and decoding, establishing the bases needed to compare two languages.

When he was ready, he depressed the pad Mareb had indicated. A segment of wall opened into the bordello.

Now, like each time he stood at the threshold, he was eager to begin, reaching for the experience as others reached for *sojyk*. He went through into a kaleidoscope of sound that tumbled visibly about the limbs of the Denorian dancers.

Six hours later, he'd found the keys. Denori was a relatively trouble-free language, its underlying world view not too far off others he'd encountered elsewhere in the galaxy. And a stroke of luck — the troupe had traveled widely and had dealt with lingsters in other languages, so they knew how to cooperate. He was feeling the exhilaration of interface now, the obliteration of self, the sense of union with other beings. He would get the job done easily in the time he had left.

He was suddenly aware that the female Mareb had pointed out was staring at him.

"Honored she-being," he addressed her, using Denorian courtesy as he now understood it. "I am honored by the light you share with me."

She seemed somehow less unjointed than her companions, less ethereal. She gazed at him, a long look from under thick, grey lashes, drawing her brows together.

"I would dance the light with you," he said.

Her frown deepened as if she concentrated on the task of deciphering his meaning from the words still clumsily chosen to express it.

Tomas found himself suddenly shivering. One side effect of the drugs was that they lowered the barriers a lingster may have raised against remembering the darker experiences of his own life. Despite his training, an image now stirred in his memory. It had been one of the brief days of Gai'ekian spring — mild, bright air, ice melting on a lake. Mitsuko had come to stand beside him, her black hair and red tunic making her a tiny flash of color like the birds Tomas fed in the snow. She'd been weeping — it was his special agony that he could no longer remember her not weeping. He tried to console her. Mitsuko was too sensitive for the job Mareb required her to do, and her guilt was driving her crazy. Hours later, she took her own life.

Someday, Tomas had sworn in his anguish, those responsible — inside the Guild or out — would pay. That had been three years ago; the opportunity hadn't come, and his thirst for it had gradually dwindled. He was a realist, was that so surprising? The Guild suppressed romantic notions like love and revenge. Now all that was important to him was getting out. The

endless weight of the work he was called to do had dulled his sense of vengeance. But the pain of his loss hadn't gone away.

The Denorian dancer lowered her gaze, and the shining hair moved forward like rain across her face. She lifted her hands in a flash of viridian and whirled away from him.

"Light comes unchorded there." The speaker was an old male, his copper-green face wrinkled and solemn.

Five of the troupe paused from their rehearsal and began stroking Tomas's brow with long fingers, their bodies curving close to his. His nerves jumped at the touch, his skin flamed.

"Honored He-being," the old man said. "There is no harmony in that one. That is why we will sell her."

Tomas perceived the world as the Denorians saw it: a construct of lights harmonizing in an endless dance. The female Mareb wanted was different; her light was not orderly but dissonant in some way Tomas didn't yet have the vocabulary to name. For a moment longer he hung in the Denorian net of light, while the computer's thin voice was a silver thread anchoring him to the heavier reality of the Gai'ekian language.

The ecstasy he'd experienced a moment before faded. The drugs were wearing off, leaving his body drained and exhausted.

On a bench along the wall were the remains of a meal Mareb had ordered sent to him. Tomas pushed aside the untouched *sojyk* decanter and sank down, his eyes heavy. He needed sleep desperately — how long had he been awake? — but there was still a good two hours' work to do with the computer, sorting and cataloging so that a nonlingster coming after him could use the program to communicate. Ah but tomorrow, he would find the *Kire-nyi* in her launch pad —

He braced his legs, ready to get up, then felt a hand on his arm.

"Don't depart yet, gentle Sen!"

Though odd, the words were Inglis. Pouring into the fragile interface between Denori and Gai'eki that he was building, they seared his mind like a touch of flame.

The golden eyes of the elusive female gazed down at him. "You're a Ter-ran hombre, aren't you?"

He nodded silently, all his vaunted skills of communication deserting him as the pale green face hovered close.

"Me too." The long fingers waved away his disbelief. "The color wears off once I halt the chemis. And the vizzies are lenses. Regard?"

She touched a finger lightly to one green eyelid and flicked a tiny amber moon into the palm of her hand. One oval-slitted eye observed him speculatively. The other was round-pupiled and the color of Earth's sky he remembered from his childhood.

He recovered his voice and his knowledge of his native tongue. "What are you doing with Denorians on a non-Federation world?"

"Fedworlds are grey!" she said. "I lusted to see bright points on the spiral. Regard, the Mom-Pop spoil me and that dulls too. I wasn't birthed on Earth. Were you, Sen?"

"Didn't you know how dangerous —"

"You transmit like the Mom-Pop!" She made a face at him. "My schoolies and I gamed at tag across our star system before we were teenies."

Surely she was joking? When he and Mitsuko had been growing up on an impoverished Earth, there'd been little time for play and even less money. He stared at her curiously. Were children so different on Earth's colony worlds?

"Falling up with the troupe aided," she said. "I'd scanned dance since I could toddle, and the Head-Sen parleyed a pittance of Inglis. Heigh-ho, there's nothing to grieve! All that's asked is grit and credit." Her hand touched his, copper-green fingers like a fine sculpture on the ebony of his skin. "But that's no matter. Now I have to slip the troupe."

"How do you propose to do that?"

"You must aid me off-world! Trust me, gentle Sen, the Mom-Pop will shower largesse."

"You don't know what you're talking about!" She was hardly more than about seventeen Earth-standard years. At that age, he and Mitsuko had been indentured to the Guild by their parents for a dozen years already. He felt a sudden welling of resentment against her kind who could afford to treat worlds as their playthings, while he would remain always a servant. "Mareb has a contract with the troupe. Nobody leaves until it expires. No exceptions. That's Gai'ekian law."

And he thought, *Least of all, you!*

She replaced the amber lens. "What's your nom?"

"Tomas Vizcano," he said stiffly.

"Isolda. That's not my authentic nom, but I favor it higher." She looked at him with the faint air of amusement that came from wealth. "You're the first Terran I've fallen up with in a jigspan, Tomas-Sen!"

"You weren't listening to what I said. You leave when Mareb wills. Not before."

"Heigh-ho, that's drole. But I can't tarry!"

Light comes unchorded — and so they would sell her. He swallowed. "The troupe —"

"Regard," she said swiftly. "The game's the thing. The Sen won't lack one player!"

A smile of innocence or cunning, he didn't know which, curled her green lips. He had a sudden flash of long-buried memory. There'd been no playthings for him as a child on Earth — only ragged birds picking scraps in gutters. He still remembered the Inglis names, *pigeon*, *sparrow*, but not what the birds looked like. He stood up, contradictory reactions at war within him: kinship with another human, exasperation with a spoiled colony brat.

Something wouldn't let him trust the girl.

"I can't accept responsibility!" he said.

She stroked his arm, a gesture both pleading and seductive. "For favor, Tomas-Sen. You don't ken. I can't linger-long with the troupe. They've been regardful, and they purpose me no hurt. But you ken the harmony they scan in their dance? They aid it with some ritual mingle-jingle of the blood. And their hemochem is poisoning me."

She gazed at him, wide-eyed, her face much too close, her voice husky. "You needs must aid me, Tomas-Sen."

He stirred uncomfortably. She seemed sincere enough, yet her explanation didn't make sense. But he knew too little about xenobiology to accuse her of lying. The irony was she would get her wish to leave the troupe, though not quite the way she hoped. So much beauty in the galaxy, he thought, and so much pain. The Guild's position was quite clear. He'd done the job he was hired to do; he should hold his tongue and leave.

But colony brat or not, she was human and deserved the small chance that knowing might give her.

Tomas sighed. "Mareb's buying you from the troupe. If you know what's good for you, you'll head north. Try to get to the port. Immediately."

For a moment he thought she hadn't understood. Then her eyes widened in alarm. "Fedcodes forbid such abomination! The law's clear! The Mom-Pop always opined —"

"This isn't a Federation world!"

"And you would aid Mareb?" she demanded.

He winced. "Don't you understand anything? I'm not Fedpolice, and I'm not the galactic savior in white armor. I'm a worn-out relic from a worn-out world. And Mareb bought me, too."

"Regard! You esteem credit above the claims of shared humanity and deliver me up to this — this creature, this monster?"

He said viciously, "If you're going to play tag with the galaxy, rich man's daughter, you'd better be prepared for the consequences!"

Isolda's lower lip quivered; small white teeth brought it under control. "I rue that I problemed you, Tomas-Sen!"

She walked away through a spiral of dancers.

"Isolda! Wait!" She was, after all, hardly more than a child. "Maybe there's something —"

But she'd already disappeared in the fluttering light.

It was probably just as well; there was very little he could have done anyway. He felt as if he'd been swimming for hours against the tide. His eyes burned from lack of sleep; he could hardly keep them open. He would go back to the commcenter and do his job. This had been Mitsuko's undoing. She'd become involved with the fate of Mareb's victim, and the guilt had destroyed her. He wouldn't sacrifice himself — especially not for such an unworthy cause. Fools deserved whatever they got in life. He'd do the job

he'd been hired to do, and then he'd get out while his brain still functioned.

A segment of wall slid open, and beyond he saw the prismatic wink of the computer's lights. He stepped through.

The sound of Mareb's fist crashing on the desk top beside the terminal dragged Tomas back from a dream of swimming underwater in darkness, trying to reach Mitsuko whose face was bloated with tears.

"Where is the female?"

Still groggy from sleep, Tomas stared up at the Gai'ekian. Mareb seized the collar of the lingster's tunic in his large hand, dragging Tomas to his feet.

"The female! Where is she?"

Alert now, Tomas saw that the wall between the commcenter and the Denorian quarters was open. In the rehearsal hall, there was agitated, dissonant movement.

Isolda had gone. He felt a sudden rush of gladness. She couldn't elude Mareb for long on her own, but Tomas's warning had given her a small chance. And he could certainly attest how skillful she was at persuading strangers to help her.

"You've betrayed me — in clear violation of the terms of your Guild contract!"

Tomas stared at the Gai'ekian. Righteous indignation mingled with fury in the princeling's expression. No client would ever expect a Guild lingster to be anything but neutral.

And the Guild itself?

Tomas knew with cold certainty it would not condone what he'd done. Mitsuko had died, obeying the Guild's austere rule to serve the monster equally with the saint.

Emotions Tomas had suppressed for a very long time broke suddenly free. Anger boiled up, an anger stronger than resentment of the spoiled rich child or fear of the consequences for himself. The Guild was wrong. One of Mareb's victims should escape! But she would need help.

"I'll find the female," he said slowly. "But you'll have to let me go alone. No guards."

The blow sent him crumpling to the floor. When his vision came back, Mareb towered over him.

"Mareb is no fool, Terran! I don't need you to find the female. But there's value in what you say. You shall make repayment. Bring her back. Then I won't kill you."

The Gai'ekian pulled him roughly to his feet. Large, blunt fingers slid round his neck and rubbed the spot behind his ear where Tomas was conscious of the buried computer link. He gritted his teeth to keep from crying out.

"I know how to go with you, Lingster." Mareb's eyes were half-lidded in

satisfaction. He opened one hand to show a tiny electrode, a temporary version of the link embedded in Tomas's skull, lying like a golden pearl in his palm. "You see, I have a new toy, a copy of your jewel — your link — so long a Guild secret! And furthermore, you foolishly left your link open while you slept. You've made it easy for me to splice in."

Tomas watched silently as Mareb pressed the tiny device, copied from the murdered lingster, against his own skull.

"You shall furnish entertainment for me. You'll do as I say, or I'll overload the link and kill you. And I'll enjoy something my brother princelings — even those who can afford this jewel — would give a fortune to know: the secrets of the Guild!"

The Gai'ekian turned to the computer, adjusting the parameters of the link so that already Tomas felt the slight scratch of contact.

"The risk," Tomas said slowly, in spite of himself. "You don't understand — it's too dangerous —"

"Yes!" The Gai'ekian's tone was exultant. "For us both. But I accept it, Lingster! And you have no choice."

Mareb pushed him, stumbling, toward a white wall that turned transparent at his approach.

Outside the house it was totally dark. The tiny moon would not rise for hours, and the only light on the snow came from the wheeling galaxy. Tomas fastened his fur jacket hurriedly. How could he possibly find her? And if he did, what then?

Then you'll bring the female to me, Lingster.

The sting of an alien voice in his mind stopped his foot in midair. His hand flew uselessly to the link site. Even though he'd known what to expect, the intrusion stunned him.

Otherwise —

The word pulsed like a malignant star in thick darkness. Then pain arced through his head like the scratch of a predator's claw, enough to remind but not to incapacitate. His thoughts were open to Mareb through the bootleg link. There was nothing he could think that Mareb wouldn't instantly know. He'd become a living extension of Mareb's eyes and ears. Mareb would know as soon as he found the girl, or if he tried to make a run for safety.

Correct! So don't try.

The reality of the Gai'ekian language in his brain was like music played too slowly, much too deep, a rolling, echoing darkness that came up from somewhere behind like the winter ocean and engulfed him in its heavy meaning.

Tomas stumbled on the icy road that crossed the huge compound, the weight of the other's presence almost physically too much to carry. It was a sour joke that he'd avoided addiction to *sojyk*. He was enslaved anyway. He sensed Mareb's dry chuckle in his mind as the Gai'ekian received that

thought.

He breathed deeply, fighting down panic. Remembering drills he'd learned when he'd first entered the Guild, he blanked his mind, shutting down the stream of left-brain chatter, leaving few thoughts for Mareb's computer to read and pass on. He wandered through the choking cold darkness, losing track of time, till the meager rest he'd gained drained away and his limbs turned to iron. Where would she be? The odd distortion of Mareb's thought seemed to have spread; the speed of his own cognition seemed to have slowed down. What had he told her? Then he forced himself not to remember.

Where are you? The nightmarish reverberations of Mareb's thought rumbled through his brain like slow thunder.

He glanced involuntarily at the buildings that lined the road, dim shapes in the starlight.

Warehouses. Look more closely, Lingster, so I may identify them.

He stared at the frozen ground underfoot.

He heard the sound through the wave of pain with which Mareb punished his disobedience. He concentrated on the pain to prevent recognition of the sound from coming to conscious awareness. He kept his eyes fastened on the barren, ice-bound stone.

It was too easy. Mareb could have found her himself. Mareb wanted Tomas to find her, wanted them to try to escape. He was going to relish their anguish. Fury swept through Tomas.

He forced the storm of emotion down. He needed to be calm to think this through. There might be a way, one slim chance after all. It took great discipline to face chaos, even for a lingster trained since childhood. "The terrible face of God," his teachers had called it, and many novices broke with fear the first time they experienced it. Mareb had a taste for the exotic, the dangerous experience, but he wouldn't know how to control it.

And the second point of honor to a Gai'ekian was risk. Mareb was a first-class risk-taker who might not pull out until it was too late.

Tomas bent down and held out his hand to the girl who was crouched, shivering, beneath a stunted, icicle-hung bush.

The black chords of Mareb's thought rolled languorously over him like a sluggish, oily sea. *You'll pay with your life if you defy me!*

By contrast, pain grew in a rising whine behind his ears. His jawbone began to vibrate. He pulled her to her feet. She resisted him, her eyes wide with fear.

"Don't argue with me," he said urgently. "I don't have the strength to fight both of you at once."

You've found the female?

Isolda opened her mouth to protest, and he clapped a hand across her lips. "Are you so anxious to die?"

Mitsuko died because of Mareb. This colony brat wasn't worthy enough

to touch the hand of a saint like Mitsuko. But that wasn't the point. He clutched at the thought: because of Mareb.

What is this? You're wasting time.

His skull ached from this echoing thunder. His face twisted in a spasm that seemed to tear him fiber from fiber. He closed his eyes. His stomach heaved violently upward into his throat, and he bent over in a wave of vomiting. When he managed to open his eyes again, he saw Isolda's terrified face.

They would wade into primal chaos together, Mareb and Tomas. But one of them wasn't prepared.

He groped at his belt. The vials tumbled free into his shaking fingers. He didn't know which vial he opened, nor did he care. The capsule grated against his dry throat, but he got it down.

What are you doing?

He grabbed the girl by the wrist as the drugs trickled through his bloodstream and into his mind. Then edges blurred, distance shrank, light drained out of the stars and spilled across the snow like curdled cream.

Ah! Now you begin to amuse me, Lingster.

They ran across a wide, barren plain that separated Mareb's compound from the spaceport.

More. I will have more.

The black tide of the Gai'ekian world view crashed into the shimmer of perception Tomas was trying to hold, obliterating it. The noise was deafening. He slapped his hands uselessly to his ears, struggling to keep out sound that was already inside his skull.

Now his mind fought with his legs, forcing them to keep on running. Isolda stumbled beside him, and he dragged her up. All around him, starlight splintered from a land turned to burning crystal. The air itself was brittle, shattering at his touch.

Superb! But don't waste time trying to escape me, Lingster, for you can't.

No, he realized, it wasn't enough. Mareb was enjoying the ride. And if he should tire of the entertainment and decide to summon his guards, Tomas and the girl would soon be dead. He felt his mind separating into two. One mind, ridden by the alien presence of Mareb, experienced the distorted landscape they ran in like the chilling slow-motion action of a dream. The other mind, unmoved at the center of the vortex, surveyed the danger Tomas himself was in, and plotted Mareb's downfall at lightning speed.

From this yawning contradiction he dragged himself up long enough for one thought to surface. The only way was to suck Mareb farther and farther into the sea of raw data until it was too late. He must wade farther out into chaos, farther than he'd ever been, carrying Mareb with him until the waves of the unfiltered, primal universe shattered over both their heads.

He fumbled with the vials, this time shucking them all open like peapods and cramming their contents into his mouth; he struggled to swallow

against the dryness of fear and nausea. Something else humans had known for a long time: the hallucinations one met in the interstices between the world views were not external. The demons lurked in the labyrinths of one's own twisted mind. A brute like Mareb would be in jeopardy. If only the Gai'ekian would leave it too late to break the link.

He would give Mareb a glimpse of God.

But he'd never tested his own training like this. He didn't know if it would be enough to save him — or whatever of him was left after the experience.

The dam broke, a sudden shock wave rocking him.

The world turned inside out. He saw no street, no warehouses, no sky, no up or down. There was no division, no separation between his skin and the external world.

What is this? Oh — magnificent! But — pain!

Particles of light crashed through hollow eyeballs and seared his brain. A tsunami of noise ripped across the sensitive membrane of his ears.

Lingster — Go more gently —

He forced himself to keep his eyelids from covering his eyes against the dazzling agony that engulfed him.

The light! Aiee! The sound!

Tomas felt as if his body was being sucked out into vacuum through the top of his head. He couldn't breathe. But still Mareb clung in his mind. Tomas forced himself deeper into the storm of raw stimuli.

Just ahead, the nightmare god of chaos loomed up in his path, amorphous, a great sucking void reaching out to crush and annihilate. Terror-stricken, Tomas clawed about in burning darkness for the cool white shadow of the emergency protocols: let go, let go, let —

No! No! The sound — I will kill you for this!

Tomas let go, losing awareness of himself, bobbing like a cork over the horror he felt. It was the only chance he had, but it might not be enough.

A bubble rose somewhere, black as space. Unfiltered, the universe stitched white-hot across his brain.

Stop! Stop! Madness!

Meaning fragmented, skittering away, echoing, echoing —

Time passed.

Someone screamed hideously.

Someone else was thinking of a starship.

The bubble filled with pain, snagged on starlight, exploded. Someone screeched like an animal torn limb from limb.

Someone was running.

Cold welled up in sudden silence.

The mist cleared for a moment and hands reached for him, dragging him. In a moment's clarity, Tomas was aware of snow-shrouded vehicles, bloated water tanks, bulking shadows under the tilt of a microwave dish, looming

gantries like long-legged bugs squatting over the icy land. He gasped for breath.

Faces stared down at him. He felt arms encircling, warmth folding him in. "Tomas-Sen? Are you —"

Then he deliberately slid back into the tumultuous void of unfiltered perception, pulling Mareb with him, holding him under until he drowned.

The god of darkness opened its jaws and swallowed the universe.

There was a sullen ache in his temples and behind his ears as he struggled to open his eyes, which felt as if they'd been sewed shut.

"Regard! Lie still. Or would you wound yourself?"

Tomas succeeded in raising the heavy lids. He recognized the smooth, functional curves and efficient spaces of a starship. He considered his surroundings cautiously. They didn't waver as he gazed at them, but held their shape. Light and shadow quilted together in the cabin, but showed no tendency to exchange places or grow malignantly.

He felt a qualified relief. He knew without any doubt the demons were only temporarily dormant.

The girl was looking down at him, strong light behind her turning the Denorian grey hair to silver. Even in shadow, he could see the icy blue of her very human eyes.

Memory rushed back, and with it the sharp agony in his head. "We made it, then?"

"We attained the *Kirenyi* 'three seconds before the solar gale' as the spacers tell! She was prepared to lift," Isolda said. "You kept squalling that singular nom over and over. Heigh-ho, I didn't ken what you intended! And then you collapsed and I must haul you. But we'd struck the port, and people aided, and I scanned the *Kirenyi* was a starship. They kenneed you were manic!"

He realized that he couldn't move; he'd been strapped into the bunk, restrained as if he were a violent madman.

"I was," he said slowly against the roaring in his ears. "I lifted all the filters at once and let insanity flood in."

"You're luck's fool to have survived, Tomas-Sen, the ship's MedSpec opines," she scolded.

He examined the contents of his mind timidly to find where the intruder still lurked in dark corners. But the monster was quiescent. Could it be? Was there to be nothing more than this violent headache? He could learn to live with that. Then he'd be free. Free of the guilt he'd carried since Mitsuko's death. Free of the Guild. Never again would he suffer the assorted horrors of interface.

And never again would he know that transcendent, mystical, orgasmic experience.

"I had a ripe task sweetening the Captain-Sen to carry us, in spite of your

bespeaking. You were ranting so drolly! He even messaged the one you nom Monitor before he would be appeased." Disapproval moved through Isolda's blue eyes, but she leaned over, releasing the bioweb that held him.

"Thank you." Perhaps he'd misjudged, mistaking her colony manners and colony speech for the real girl underneath. For a moment, a sense of shared humanity warmed him and he smiled.

Isolda didn't smile back. "But regard. You should've scanned more thrift. Your medbills account quite high — your Monitor-Sen opines the Guild won't recompense — and your credit sufficed for only one to slip this freight box."

He raised one hand slowly and saw the tremor — a tremor he couldn't stop. There was always a price for looking at the naked face of God, he thought.

"Tomas-Sen!"

He stared at her, the ache in his head and the tremor in his hand getting in the way of understanding. "What?"

"I regret, Tomas-Sen. I ken my suite sucks credit, but heigh-ho! I couldn't brook such cramping. Fear not. As soon as I attain home, the Mom-Pop will repay."

His savings — gone? Surely she didn't mean —

But she did.

How long before a ship took off from Shulam 5 for her parents' world — wherever that was — providing, of course, she didn't get bored before that and run away again on another adventure? He closed his eyes. With his money gone, the link would stay welded into his brain forever. He couldn't escape that the way he'd escaped Mareb.

"Regard. You'll be rightward once we make planetfall," she said briskly. "The Captain-Sen opines there's work aplenty on Shulam 5 for a lingster with your savvy!"

Another thought pushed through his misery. He struggled to sit up, all his muscles jerking in contradictory efforts, his nerves screaming in anguish. He gave up the attempt and lay back. "What about Mareb?"

Amusement flickered in the blue eyes. "Heigh-ho, it was grievous! The Monitor-Sen declares the computer needs must have malfed. Mareb-Sen will not be prime again!"

So his gamble had worked, and that was the official version Itaka had dreamed up to cover him? No, not him. Itaka would wash his hands of a renegade like Tomas. It was the Guild's good name that the Monitor was protecting. The Guild's reputation had to stay blameless for the sake of future clients. But Mareb would claim no more victims.

In spite of his pain, Tomas laughed. *Mitsuko, the debt's paid!*

Isolda — or whatever her name was — brushed fading green fingers over his brow, then turned down the cabin light and left him alone.

So, he thought, he was not to start his retirement just yet, and the link

remained in place. He turned the thought over in his mind. Was it really so bad? The aftershocks that continued to devastate his central nervous system would eventually die down, then there'd be time to assess what permanent damage — if any — had been done. He was strong, after all; perhaps he'd be lucky.

And really, what else would he have done on Shulam 5? He had no other skills. He might as well admit; he was addicted, though not to *sojyk*.

Then he thought of the Guild. He'd violated his oath and interfered in a client's affairs. They would never take him back. And without the Guild it would be harder to find clients. Certainly, it would be more dangerous.

But he'd survived the danger of Mareb, and he'd survived chaos. He'd find a way to survive without the Guild.

Just before he slipped below the benign surface of sleep, Mitsuko's gentle face rose smiling in his memory. ●

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THE SKANKY SOUL OF JIMMY TWIST

by Bruce Bethke

art: John Lakey

Bruce Bethke began writing this story after reading an anthology of poorly imitated Lovecraft. The constant use of black and white metaphors, with black/primitive always equated with evil and white/civilized smugly on the side of good, struck the author as being not just a quaint echo of nineteenth-century imperialism, but in fact an example of modern living racism at work. So he set out to write a story that stands the black/white polarity on its "pointy little head."

Besides writing, the author plays the guitar and owns four, three of which are Gibsons. After fourteen years in the electric and electronic music business, he has also acquired a mandolin and learned to play "Turkey in the Straw."

It was late in the spring of 1977 when I returned, not by choice, to London. I'd been on the bum about the continent for some two years, busking for change and just generally enjoying life. The busking went well; I'm a good guitarist, a fair singer, and blessed with the sort of thin, blond, boyish good looks that appeal to the wallets of tourist women.

Unfortunately, the "enjoying life" bit climaxed in a brief but intense affair with Katrina, the pudgy daughter of a Hamburg banker. When she and I parted company that May, there were no regrets, no accusations, no hard feelings — and no words about the skin-headed young thug she was engaged to marry before she met me. I do wish she'd mentioned him.

For as it happens, he followed me to Amsterdam, bashed me silly, smashed my guitar, tossed the pieces in the Oude Schans Kanaal, tossed me in after it, and landed the both of us in the Jordaan clink. His family's solicitor arrived the next morning, of course, and took him back to Hamburg — less a 50-guilder fine for dumping rubbish in the canal — but I went before the dock for vagrancy. By noon they'd seized my passport and put me on the train to Vlissingen, thence to spend another cheery night in jail before catching the morning boat back to Mother England.

I really *do* wish she'd mentioned him.

Not that I felt bad for being deported; the Dutch don't have proper beds in their jails, just concrete slabs with a thin pretense of mattress. I didn't mind leaving.

Trouble was, I was going back to England with no money, no prospects, no choices, and above all, no guitar. I'd been quite attached to that guitar; it

was a lovely old 1953 Gibson LGO that'd belonged to my Uncle Lewis, and now the dear thing was a clutter of kindling floating somewhere in the Zuider Zee.

Still, as Rasham was to later tell me through Jimmy Twist: "The cold rain it must fall / to bring the bountifulness forth. The dark pain you must feel / to love the gladful tidings more."

I will admit that if he'd tried to tell me that just then, though, I would've broken his nose.

The next day was spent in wallowing across the Channel from Vlissingen to Sheerness. In the morning I parked myself in a cold metal chaise lounge on the foredeck and claimed I was making plans, but mostly I stared. Stared at the oily grey sky. Stared at the somewhat darker oily grey sea. Stared at the gull droppings and rust streaks on the deck. Then I opened my kit bag and stared awhile at the neck and peghead of my guitar: the only pieces I'd managed to rescue during the preceding two days' lunacy. The poor thing would never play again, but I resolved that if I ever lucked into a mansion, I'd mount the neck above the mantelpiece.

It was while my eyes were drifting back toward another good stare at the sky that I realised I was being stared at. Sitting balanced on the starboard rail, with nothing behind him but five hundred miles of open sea and then Norway, was a Jamaican, dreadlocks whipping in the breeze. The start that came with realising we were looking directly into each other's eyes nearly tipped my chair.

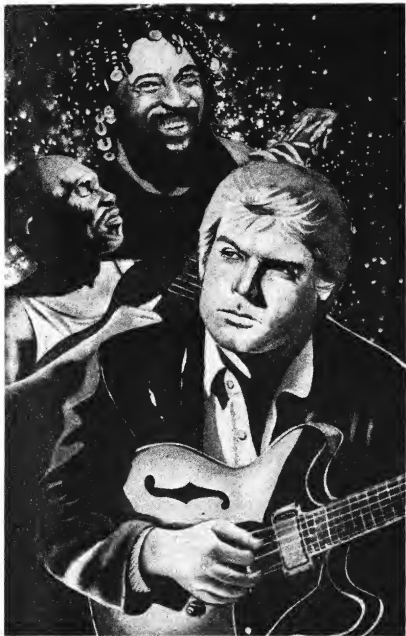
It wasn't as though I'd never seen a rastaman before — I'd partied with quite a few of them; they always had the best ganja — but this man seemed a focus of *intensity*. His eyes were black volcanic glass set in ivory, binding mine. Standard English deference demands you quickly look away from a stranger, but I could not. Perhaps I'd been among the sun-starved Northern Europeans too long, but he seemed *darker* than black.

Then he — smiled? His lips parted, his cheeks grew taut, he bared his teeth: I certainly hoped it was a smile. In any event, I flashed my best Stan Laurel in response, and he threw his head back and laughed hoarsely, the thin sound streaming away in the breeze. I used the opportunity to glance away; when I looked back, he was gone. At first I thought he'd pitched over the rail, but as I looked 'round for someone to report it to, I saw him sauntering aft, singing softly in the same hoarse voice. With great relief, I went back to soaking my feet in a pool of self-pity.

We ran into a bit of weather in the afternoon, and I moved to a vacant chair in the ship's salon, where I remained unable to decide what I would do after the ferry docked. Get my passport reinstated and return to the continent? Appealing, but impossible. Until I repaid the fine and the fare, I was stranded in the U.K.

Stay on in Sheerness, then, or Gillingham? In *Gillingham*? Seriously . . .

Hitch to Birmingham and drop in on Mum and Dad? Well yes, I could,



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but either Dad would beat me for losing his brother's guitar or Mum would tell me — again — how I was headed to a bad end just like that ne'er-do-well Lewis.

Still, I was stuck for a better idea and had just resigned myself to crawling meekly back to Birmingham when one really nasty thought popped up and queered the deal. Mum always treated the guitar as if it were the first cousin to heroin. Suppose she welcomed me with open arms, for finally being rid of it?

That left London. London is the sump of the Isles; if you can't make it anywhere else, you go to London, tell people you're a musician, and live on the dole. Even in London, though, I knew I was in for a tough hang of it: nearly 25, I still wore patched Levi's and long hair, and my taste in music ran to American Rhythm & Blues, which at that moment was out of vogue again. (British music fans have no rivals for fickleness, excepting perhaps this Italian heiress I met on Mallorca.)

But I had some borderline mates I could look up on Fonthill Road, and with a bit of research . . .

By the time the ferry docked I had a rough sketch of my future. Clearing customs with the usual annoyance, I converted my last few guilders to pounds and pence, nicked a copy of *Time Out* from a newstand, and hung my thumb out on the motorway. Two days later I surfaced in London; along the way I'd traded my least ratty Levi's for some camouflage commando knickers, borrowed a scissors and done a nasty job on my hair, and changed my name to *Stig Bollock*.

London, in the summer of 1977, was a marvelous place to be impoverished, unemployed, and living on the cheap. I stayed for a bit with some lads I'd met in Milano, and they introduced me to Gina, who took me in for two weeks and gave me urethritis, but Public Health cleared that right up. Gina in turn put me on to a bunch of squatters in Finsbury Park, and from there I went to a Mrs. O'Grady's rooming house, which was not as cheap as squatting but a bit safer from a materialistic standpoint. By the end of June I'd a rathole flat, a Fender Squire with no serial number and a dubious past, a matching amplifier, and a bit of a reputation as a guitar player. The crowd I'd fallen in with was exciting, and my prospects for getting into steady gigging were quite good; on the whole it was a keen turnabout, given that six weeks before I'd been bobbing in a garbage-laden canal and wondering if anyone would fish me out. Everything was falling together wonderfully — 'til I met Mr. Twist.

Jimmy Twist moved in on the morning of the first of July. I remember because Old Duckbury and I were sitting out on the front stoop that morning, having a particularly bad chat. Duckbury was a retired career soldier, one of those grim relics of empire that should be declared part of the National Historic Trust and only allowed out on holidays. Tall, cadaverously thin,

yet with a thick bristling white moustache and hair to match, he claimed to have served in the Boer War, served in Burma, served in Normandy — he carried himself with such magnificent Prussian arrogance I kept expecting him to claim he'd served at Waterloo.

Anyway, Old Duckbury and I had taken to sitting out on the front stoop in the mornings before the heat built up, chatting a bit and sharing a Guinness or two. The conversations were hard to follow, as he had a habit of slipping from war to war, but it was his Guinness, so I did my best to look attentive. The morning that Twist moved in, Duckbury was telling a particularly tedious story about some tart he'd met in Paris, and I was nodding politely and thinking of getting out my Fender to try a bit of busking — old habits die hard — when suddenly the most clapped-out Cortina I've ever seen came bouncing up to the kerb and a half-dozen blacks leapt out.

"'Od's Balls!" Duckbury yelled, "It's the Zulu Nation!"

"Now, now," Mrs. O'Grady chimed in from behind us as she opened the front door, "you keep a civil tongue in your head, Mr. Duckbury." She hurried down the steps, quick as her fat little legs would carry her, and spoke to the blacks. "'Tis the door at the top of the stairs. I've unlocked it, and you may go right up." Most of the men grabbed cartons out of the boot of the Cortina and started in.

"Mrs. O'Grady!" Duckbury roared, "I've put up with Pakis and Chinese and Lord knows what else you've seen fit to bring in, but if you think I'll live in a house full of nig-nogs —"

I had to admire her; she tapped her slippered foot, pursed her lips, and shot Duckbury a glare that would've peeled paint, but when the words came out, they were soft and sweet. "This is our new boarder, Mr. Twist. He'll be taking the attic flat. You'll be nice to him won't you, Mr. Duckbury?" As she spoke, the driver of the car stepped 'round to the kerb, and I saw with some surprise that he was the Jamaican I'd encountered on the ferry.

"I'm giving notice! I swear it!" Duckbury stood, grabbed the half-finished Guinness out of my hand, and stormed into the house.

"Pay him no mind," she said to Twist. "Ducky's loud but harmless." Then she turned to me. "Mr. Twist, I'd like to introduce you to another of our tenants. Mister —" she paused, wrestling with it a moment. "Stig," she said at last. She never could bring herself to calling me "Mr. Bollock."

"H'lo," I said, "I believe we've met." All this got me was a blank look, so I elaborated. "The ferry to Sheerness?" After another blank look, I shrugged, said, "Sorry, must be mistaken," and tried another subject. "If it's any consolation, Duckbury gives notice every time *anyone* moves in. You should have heard the fuss when I first came 'round!" I laughed — and felt profoundly stupid, for I was laughing alone.

After an excruciating moment of silence, Twist said, "Ah, I see. He thinks you and I be alike." He laughed politely and then turned to Mrs. O'Grady. "Excuse me." He flashed me a quick, condescending smile as he started up

the stairs.

And that is how Mr. Twist came to live over my head. He was an odd sort of neighbour; that is, I had some degree of rapport with every other tenant in Mrs. O'Grady's house. Even the bank clerk on the first floor knew me, to the extent that he lifted his nose and looked disgusted whenever we passed in the hall. But the one time I met Twist on the stairs, he was just sitting there, chanting softly in some strange language and seeming not to see me. If the smell hanging like a cloud about him was ganja, it was the most potent pot I'd ever caught a noseful of: I got dizzy just walking by.

That meeting on the stairs turned out to be quite unique in another way as well, for as the hot weeks wore on, Twist came down from the attic less and less often, until at last he never came out at all. Instead, small groups of strange black men popped by to see him at odd hours and stayed in his flat, conversing in low, dark voices. Occasionally, I caught bits of words piercing through with sudden clarity — *rasta, jah, burning, death* — but nothing that ever made real sense.

In time, I began to notice the music as well: a primal, throbbing, savage sort of music I more felt than heard through the ceiling. A pulsing, driving rhythm that stirred strange passions within me; God, I wished I could play like that! Between that funky beat and my blond good looks I could make a fortune!

Duckbury, however, grew restive as July melted into August. "He's not to be trusted," I once heard him shouting at Mrs. O'Grady. "I fought against the Mau Mau. I know their primitive ways!"

"Oh, shut up!" she'd yelled back. "If the music bothers you so, turn your telly up!"

Another time, when I joined Duckbury on the front stoop for a cold German lager (he may've been excruciatingly British, but even he wasn't fool enough to drink warm beer in August), he said, "You know, Stig, I wonder whether we were wise to open the empire. It's a small island, after all, scarcely room enough for we Englishmen."

I smiled — it'd taken a month for Duckbury to include me in "we Englishmen" — then said, "I take it you're still upset about our Jamaican neighbour."

"I don't believe Twist is Jamaican, not for a minute. He looks Haitian to me," he said, worrying his mustache.

"So?" I asked.

"SO?" he thundered back at me. "Where do you think *voodoo* comes from, you twit? That man has opened a voodoo temple — a *hounfour* — right over our very heads! Every night they're doing their darkie rituals; I can hear the music!"

"I rather like the music," I said softly.

"Do you? That's the whole problem! They seduce you young people with their jungle music, drive our young English girls sex crazy with their animal

beat, and —" I set down the beer and stood to leave; the strong aftertaste of bigotry was proving quite unpalatable. "You mark my words!" Duckbury's voice followed me. "Those nig-nogs only want to slit your throat and dance on the ruins of white civilization!"

I went up to my room, got out my Fender, and thrashed through a few chords. Truth to tell, I was starting to feel a bit obsessed with Twist's music. It seemed so driving, so hypnotic, so much *better* than the head-banging punk rock I was playing. With a twinge of nerves, I suddenly realised I was feeling drawn — no, *compelled* — up the stairs to Twist's apartment.

I fought it off, and thrashed my Fender some more.

A few nights later my band did a club gig, a freebie but a gig nonetheless, and so about three A.M. I found myself lying in my bed in the bloody hot August night, quite unable to sleep. Tossing, turning, exhausted from playing but still wired up, listening to the music filtering down from the attic again; it seemed louder this time, more insistent, as if it were calling me, teasing me, tugging at my soul strings —

I sat straight up in bed. I *had* to know.

I leapt out of bed, raced up the dark stairs (the bulb had burned out some weeks before), and began pounding on his door. To my surprise it was not latched, but swung right open. The room was lit by a single, flickering candle in the middle of the floor, and a group of black men sat in a circle about it. Their gleaming eyes turned toward the doorway as if expecting me.

"I, uh . . ." I said. Their hostility was a palpable thing in the air, tugging at the hair on the nape of my neck. Twist's eyes, his *intense* eyes, bored into me like hot skewers. "I really dig the music you're playing," I said quickly.

"Close the door. Sit yourself down," Twist commanded as the men moved aside to make room for me in the circle.

I did as I was told, and when I was sitting, I tried again. "Y'see, I'm a musician, Mr. Twist —"

"Do not call me by that name," he said. "That is only the name of the shape I now work through. My spirit-name is Rasham Rasta Jah Afrika."

Spirit-name? Oh no, I'd walked in on a l-o-o-n-e-y!

"So, Mister Stig," he continued, "you like the music of the people of Jah?" I nodded cautiously. "You wish you could play music like that?" I nodded again. He leaned forward, close to the candle. His goatlike, bearded face was a shadow mask of ebony and red, and he hissed, "To make music like that, you would have to be black. You want to lose your skin, it going to *cost* you, mon."

"Oh, hell," I said as my little white testicles crawled up and hid.

I spent the rest of that night listening to Rasham and his friends talk in an island dialect I understood only slightly, and in the morning he started me running the first of many odd little errands: out to Knightsbridge to find a

Jaguar Mark IX and steal its hubcaps, down to Hammersmith to pawn said hubcaps and buy food, over to Islington to feed a toothless old madwoman living in a dustbin. That night he sent me out to one of my favorite clubs, not to drink or dance or pick up birds but merely to watch and listen.

As voodoo rituals go, this one seemed pretty tame.

The next morning Twist came down to pound on my door at six A.M. and make sure I caught my morning chat with Duckbury. When I calmed down enough to speak without obscenities, I said, "Let me get this straight. You *want* me to keep talking to the old bigot?"

Twist snapped his fingers a few times to set a rhythm and sang: "You must not feed the fire of intolerance / if you would fight discrimination. Judge not the evil of another man / for you are not the Tribulation."

That made as much sense as any of Duckbury's war stories, so I smiled, nodded politely, considered getting out my guitar to try some busking . . .

This kept up for weeks. Between errands I became a regular at the meetings in the attic, and I kept waiting for someone to elaborate on the *cost* bit. It never happened. So in the mornings I'd head downstairs to share beer and dire talk with Duckbury, who seemed to think some sort of battle for my soul was shaping up, and try as I might, I could not disabuse him.

It was *dull*, up in that attic, listening, listening, listening, and hoping to learn; sometimes from Rasham, who spoke in rhymed couplets and sang as often as he spoke; sometimes from Jimmy Twist, who was a swell chap at parties and on the whole a lot more fun to be around. In time I did learn to tell who he was at any given moment, and in time I learned enough of the island patois to join the conversations. Much of what I said amused Twist and caused him to light up another spliff; much of what I said annoyed Rasham, and as August trickled away, he grew increasingly impatient with me.

But truth to tell, I was getting impatient with Rasham, too. I'd spent weeks with him, listening to his endless prattle on life, death, and the immortal soul, and I'd yet to learn a single musical riff! One night he sent me, alone, to walk the streets of Brixton 'til dawn, just to prove that I had no need for fear. Okay, so I learned Brixton wasn't nearly as nasty a place as I'd thought, but that taught me less than nil about music.

The closest we came to music was the night he asked me to bring my guitar up to his room, only to touch it, snort derisively, and say, "This be metal, mostly, and plastic. The livingness be buried too deep. You must get another instrument."

Right-o, no problem, I'll just write a cheque. Shall I get gold-plated tuning pegs while I'm at it? He did not appreciate the sarcasm.

When the last week of August hove into view, though, Rasham seemed to have a change of heart. "The covenant between a man and the music of Jah," he said one day, "be not lightly entered into. Mister Stig, you be not yet ready." He sighed. "You may never be ready." He arched his back,

looked at the cobwebbed ceiling, and scratched his head. For the first time, I noticed a sense of weariness in the way he moved, like an old horse in his last summer.

"But I can wait no longer; my time be growing very short," Rasham continued, at last. "Mister Stig, I have one last errand for you." And this time, the instructions he gave me made sense.

Until he insisted on sending Jimmy Twist with me, though, I didn't realise how serious this was to him. Taking my Fender along, we spent the entire day prowling through the guitar shops of Charing Cross Road, trying to find an instrument he approved of. I saw a few shiny new Strats I really liked and a metal-flake pink Hagstrom with pushbuttons that appealed to my sense of humor, but those he dismissed with a contemptuous snort. I looked at a variety of Gibsons as if I could afford them and in one shop actually found the box of an L-20 archtop — some ass of a heavy-metal rocker had sawn the neck off, trying to build a custom guitar — which I showed Twist as I explained about the neck of Uncle Lewis' guitar.

I swear to God there were tears in his eyes when he laid fingers on the L-20 and answered in Rasham's voice. "It be a good dream," he said, "but only the living can be healed. The dead cannot be risen by such as I." We moved on.

Toward dusk, I was getting fed up. "Let's hang it up," I suggested. "Maybe we'll have better luck on the morrow."

"No," Twist said, "it must be tonight. Rasham's time be growing very short." I argued, but in the end we tried one last pawnshop.

I was up front, trying to tune an old Harptone with a neck like a longbow, when I heard the most *marvelous* popping and jiving sounds come dancing out of the back of the shop. The proprietor and I walked over to find Twist standing behind a dusty old Kay upright bass, running his hands over it as a man would caress his lover. "Stig," he said, "this be *it*."

"Jimmy," I said, "I don't like to play bass. Front men are always guitarists."

He turned his eyes upon me and repeated, "This be it." He would brook no argument from me, but instead turned to the pawnbroker and started haggling over price.

Half an hour later, I walked out of there a bass player.

Twist insisted on taking the bass up to his room that night. I was quite tired from the day's shopping and so turned in early, but about midnight I was awakened by one of his friends pounding on my door. "Rasham say to come up" was his message. I hitched up my pants and followed him up the steps.

Rasham evidently had been preparing for this for some time. The flat was crowded with black men and women, a few of whom I'd come to know; the air was heavy with the smell of roasted chicken and prime ganja. What

struck me as most odd was how *quiet* the people were; this night the music, the powerful and insistent music, was curiously absent.

My string bass lay in the middle of the floor, inside a circle of candles. Rasham was kneeling, caressing its peghead, and cooing softly in island dialect. Looking up at me, he said, "Friends, it be time." Immediately, what little murmur of conversation there'd been died away. One by one, the people came to kneel in a great circle; one by one, the candles were snuffed out until at last there was but one candle burning in the center of the circle.

Rasham stood up and raised the bass to playing position. "Friends," he began, "tonight I and I be calling together the people of Jah for to witness the sealing of the covenant. Mister Stig, come forward!" Hesitantly, I stepped up to the edge of the circle. He looked sternly at my pants and said, "You going to lose *all* your skin? Or just above the waist?" I must have looked quite puzzled because he shouted, "Take off your pants, mon!"

I wanted to laugh and walk out right then, but I looked at all those somber black faces and couldn't. Instead I slowly, hesitantly, and with a great deal of blushing, undid my fly and dropped my trousers. A few of the women giggled involuntarily at my lily-white bum, then hushed.

"That be better," Rasham said. "Now, take your instrument." He held forth the neck of the bass. I stepped forward — awkwardly, for to take it as he wanted me to meant I had to stand with the one lit candle between my feet, and there was heat enough to notice on my more tender parts. But take it I did, and I stood there, nervous and uncomfortable, while he bowed his head and mumbled something.

"Rasham," I interrupted him with a whisper, "is this, y'know, like magic?"

Rasham considered it a moment. "Yes," he said.

"Is this" — I screwed my courage up — "is this *black* magic?"

He smiled a wide, toothy grin. "Yes!"

"I'm not — I mean, it's not like I really believe I have one, but I'm not selling my soul or anything, am I?"

Rasham's eyes bugged out, and then he burst into an incredible fit of Jimmy Twist laughter. In seconds, everyone in the room was convulsed with laughter. "*Your* soul?" Rasham gasped at last, wiping tears from his eyes. "Why should *I* want such a sick, crippled thing? White boy, I do not try to take your soul. I be giving you one!"

"But you said it was black magic!" I argued, more from embarrassment than disappointment.

"Foolish mon!" he laughed, shaking his head. "You think with the color of your skin! You think white be good, black be evil!"

"But to the people of Jah, we think: the sick man's face be pale. The dead man's face be pasty and white. The face of the oppressor — and the oppressed! — be white. Have you learned *nothing* from Duckbury?"

They talk about ideas crystallising. At that moment I finally understood

the expression, for I felt a nebulous idea suddenly become a vivid truth. Duckbury was not evil. His sin was that he had served both the wicked and the righteous without question. Centuries of heritage and tradition weighed upon him, obscuring his sense of right and wrong, and every time he'd fought for justice he'd also fought for racism, for condescension, for the "white man's burden" . . .

And in the end, the masters he served had sucked him dry and cast away the bitter husk of an old man. That was why he sat on the front stoop, refighting his wars of oppression: he was desperately trying to convince himself that *he* was not oppressed.

"The fertile earth be black," Rasham continued. "The healthy, the beautiful, the free be *black*." He paused and composed his face into a stern mask. "So, are you ready for to lose your skin? Or will you keep thinking with it?"

Old Duckbury had let the cultural rubbish of his skin muffle the voice of his soul. As had I. "I'm ready," I said without hesitation.

Oh, that my gift were words and I could describe that night! The ritual was beautiful and joyous, and I wish I could pop over to Canterbury and say, "Look here, lads, I've found something you've lost," but I wouldn't know what to tell them next. That my ears still ring with song and laughter, and a music so glorious it caught me up and carried me away? That Rasham, with a touch, made me *part* of the music, and it was so moving and true it fulfilled everything I'd ever dared to hope or dream?

Would they just smile condescendingly if I told them that the bass and I had melted, flowed together, become as lovers and then closer? We synergised; my fingers flew across the strings without effort, and every note I played was in time, in tune, and simply *right*. There were no longer any barriers between my heart and the music of my instrument, just as there were no barriers between my soul and the hand that played me. I too had become an instrument, playing in the great dance that moves earth and sky. Rasham had shown me the groove.

Praise Bountiful Jah, I had found the groove!

When next I was aware, a sweet bright dawn was breaking over London and I was in my room, still naked, but relaxed, confident, and blazing away on my bass. Somewhere in the old, sad parts of my heart, the crippled thing that was Stig Bollock awoke, listened to my playing, and was stunned by what he heard.

No, I had not suddenly and magically become a great musician. I was playing with the same measure of skill and talent I'd had the day before.

But now I played *without* some things: without fear, without confusion, without Stig's cynical appraisal of the music's market value. Moreover, I was playing *with* one very new and wonderful thing: the simple knowledge, deep at the core of my being, that I had been blessed. I had always been

blessed. Blessing is funny, that way; it's not a reward at all. It's a challenge. At birth I'd been given the gift of music, and the Lord had waited all this time to see what I would make of it. Rasham was exaggerating when he'd said he was giving me a soul. Rather, he had awakened the one I'd always had, and freed it from a centuries-old tradition of self-repression.

I had shed my guilty skin.

When the sun was fairly up, I pulled on my trousers and went down to see Duckbury. It was the elation of the moment, I suppose; I had this queer idea I could heal him with a touch, if only I could see him while the night was still fresh in my mind.

In bathrobe and slippers, he answered the door. Though his hair and moustache were neatly brushed, his face was even more pinched and sour than usual, as I'd caught him with his teeth out. "Duckbury!" I shouted, grabbing him by the sleeves. "Stop punishing yourself! You are forgiven!"

For a moment he stared as if I were quite mad, then an odd mixture of sternness and pity flooded into his face. "I see," he said quietly, "they've won." He gently prized my hands off his sleeves and began easing me back into the hall. "What did they do?" he continued, still quietly. "Convince you that black is white? Show you the Devil and tell you he's God? I've seen a lot of good men fall to that one; it's an old darky trick."

"No, you've got it wrong!" I protested.

"I'm sorry," he said with surgical compassion, "but you need more help than I can give now." Flashing a tight, clipped smile, he slammed the door. Stig Bollock surfaced for a moment to suggest, with a snarl, that Duckbury'd missed a great career in mortgage banking.

Then my new inner calm took over. Duckbury could wait; there would be a time to help him later. All that was meant to happen would happen in Jah's own good time. I decided to pop upstairs and have a chat with Twist about my future.

His door was locked.

I watched for a week, but there was no sign of comings or goings. Within a few days, I was uncomfortable; within the same few days, there was also no mistaking the growing smell of decay emanating from Twist's room or the odd, moist spot on my ceiling. By week's end, it had grown into a large patch of slippery ooze that spread down my walls, peeling the wallpaper and blackening the paint. Stig Bollock surfaced again, more strongly, to batter and rail against his confines and tell me what an enormously gullible idiot my true soul was — a calm and beatific idiot, perhaps, but an idiot nonetheless.

I began to feel worried.

Sunday morning, on Mrs. O'Grady's insistence, Duckbury, I, and the bank clerk broke down the door. The first breath of corruption that wafted out of the room drove us back (drove the clerk all the way back to his room, in fact, where he booted his breakfast all over the carpet), but Duckbury and

I held kerchiefs over our noses and, fighting our gag reflexes, forced ourselves back into the room again.

Twist had skipped out, owing two month's rent and leaving several bags of rubbish in the kitchen. The week-old chicken leftovers were exceptionally vile; we traced the moisture to a leaky gasket on the loo.

Shortly after Twist moved on, another black man stopped by to drop off a package Twist'd meant to leave me. Unwrapping it, I found a final message from Rasham and a remarkable collection of records: Toots and the Maytals, Bob Marley and the Wailers, Jimmy Cliff . . . Suddenly, I realised what I'd been listening to all along.

I had to change my name and hair again, of course. Stig was too well known for his callow cynicism; his old mates would not have believed his change of heart was genuine. That winter, I formed a new band. Within a year, between the reggae beat and my blond good looks, I *did* make a fortune. A *sizable* fortune.

I own an estate in Coventry now, with a massive marble fireplace over which hangs the neck of a certain much-beloved Gibson guitar. I spend a fair amount of time there, what with all the publicity bashes, record company parties, and whatnot. I do have an image to maintain, after all.

Or rather, I have Duckbury to maintain it. He makes a marvelous, if over-paid, majordomo. Under his command the gardener has done wonders with the roses. Of course, Duckbury still thinks I'm quite mad, and now and again he tries to talk me into behaving the way a proper lord of the manor is expected to behave.

There will be a time to heal Duckbury. Perhaps next summer, when his beloved roses bloom again . . .

Mrs. O'Grady couldn't refuse my solicitor's offer to buy her boarding house for twice its appraised value. She's moved back to County Sligo and is spending her sunset years with her family, telling them marvelous stories of the odd folk in London. Buying her out felt so good I decided to buy a few more boardinghouses in Finsbury Park, and a whole string of row houses in Brixton. That's where I live, when I'm not on tour or obliged to be at the estate. The squatters who fill my houses think I'm just another chap trying to cultivate a vague resemblance to a famous rock star, even when I show up with a lorry full of groceries and feed the neighbourhood.

I tell them I robbed a store. It's easier to explain, and it's in accord with Rasham's final instructions. He's placed a lien against me that I will be paying off the rest of my days, in the coin of Jah: *Always keep a warm bed and a full plate for the hungry stranger who comes in His name*. I spend a lot of time about the row houses, making sure that everyone who knocks is welcome, for we all come in His name whether we know it yet or not.

Perhaps my motives are less than pure. I also spend a lot of time among the squatters in hopes that Jimmy Twist will again show up or that I will

again find Rasham in some stranger's eyes. For you see, part of being a famous musician is meeting the thousands of kids who wish they were you. Most stars consider them a nuisance.

Myself? I want to introduce them *all* to Rasham.



I'M GOING HOME

I'm going home, small sacrifice;
I'll do without smart furniture a year,
or skip the flashy astrocar,
and save my buck/yens for the transmat,
to broadcast my quarks back home.

I'm going home.
The folks back home, so friendly with the whales,
preserving the tradition of reforestation,
city preservation, Edenification,
it's better than I left it, I need a vacation: I'm going home.

Some men are only talk, they say they long
for home and Mom, or a gal with ultraviolet eyes.
But when Star Summer rolls along
it's money for some other cause
like betting, women, wine or song.
But me, I'm going home.

They claim they want to go
but they have no proof to show
of their desire. No,
the mystic call of home unheard, they wait out life
their blood dilute, inside the limits of belief.
You carry the universe within yourself.
Don't they know?

I'm going home. If you forget your home,
you refute the oceans in your veins
the limestone in your bones and strontium, now cool
from the old atomic age that would have blown us all away.

Good thing the transmat to the stars
uncorked the pressure on the ecosphere
and freed us to inhabit the suburban galaxy.

Ten million charted planet systems!
One for every splinter group,
or terrorist-turned-pilgrim group;
all hot-tempered tantrum-throwers
visit contested homelands anytime, now that homeland's
so depopulated that there's room to share.
It isn't politics for me, I'm going home.

Cheap new worlds for everyone
each sect, each fallen royal house,
saves face by fleeing into Space
(round trip extra, children free)
wagon-training past the speed of light.
A rolling stone gathers no mass, but me, I'm going home.

Hello again, Mr. Transmat Man,
please shoot my quarks across the span
of the Milky Way, it's time, I'll pay,
I'll leave today, hooray, hooray,
I'm on my way, my holiday:

I'm going home.

— Christine and Jonathan Post



SCIENCE FICTION ON VIDEO: German Expressionism Meets Hollywood

by Matthew J. Costello

FILM ESSAY

This is the second of a four-part series that traces the history and evolution of science-fiction films, the major themes, and the technological breakthroughs. The first installment of the series, "Science Fiction on Video: Classics of the Silent Era," also written by Matthew J. Costello, appeared in our January 1988 issue.

Appropriately enough, something strange happened to science-fiction films in the 1930s and 1940s. One can almost imagine, yes, Rod Serling stepping out of the mist to explain why the early '30s were so rich in classic and near-classic genre films.

And yet there were almost none in the '40s.

No, let's make that a flat-out zero for the '40s (and we'll see how well that rather brash claim stands).

And then there's the odd fact that three of the period's most important films are the handiwork of a full-blown genius from England who brought to Tinsel Town the heady, gothic aroma of German Expressionism.

German Expressionism, as an artistic movement, was actually a short-lived phenomenon. One group, which called itself *Die Brücke* ("The Bridge"), was active from 1905 to 1913, while *Der Blaue Reiter* ("The Blue Rider") — named for Kandinsky's painting *Le Chevalier Bleu* — flourished from 1911 to 1914. These two groups, based in Dresden and Munich respectively, involved some of the most influential artists of the period — Oskar Kokoschka, Egon Schiele, Paul Klee, and others.

The Expressionist movement was nothing less than an intense psychological "realism" that was a direct reaction to Impressionism and realistic

art. The Expressionistic artists often lived communally and favored images of a primitive, violent, and often demonic quality. What appeared to be a bizarre distortion in reality was designed to cut to the personal realm of dreams, alienation, and psychological truth.

Films adopted this ground-breaking style, as witnessed by Ernst Toller's *The Machine Wreckers* and Frank Wedekind's *Pandora's Box*, which featured Jack the Ripper. So it was the cinema — a popular art — that took the strange images of Expressionism and brought them to the masses.

Murnau's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919) offered, according to Kenneth MacGowan, "strange distortions, distortions of the mind and distortions of flat scenery, painted angles and shadows." Other films quickly introduced Expressionistic writing and decor — Paul Wegener's *Der Golem* (1920), Fritz Lang's *Dr. Mabuse* (1922), and Michael Powell's *The Thief of Baghdad* (1940).

But it's not without irony that it would reach its ripest development in Hollywood, in the 1930s. The 20-year stretch from 1930 to 1949 would begin with an Expressionistic masterpiece, *Frankenstein* (which most of us grew up with without seeing at least two absolutely crucial scenes that completely change one's perception of the

old boy). And it would end also with Frankenstein's monster, now bumbling around while waiting to get Lou Costello's brain in Universal's last horror-hurrah, *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (1948).

There are even more mysteries lurking about, like the unavailability of Fredric March's acclaimed portrayal of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in the 1932 feature, and just why we all seem to like *King Kong* so much.

There'll be tracks leading back to the key silent SF classics and foreshadowing of what would eventually develop in the '50s when science-fiction films exploded in number.

This time, it all begins on the London stage.

Before *Frankenstein* (Universal, 1931, 71 min.), there was *Journey's End* (1930).

It was a London play staged by James Whale who has been described (in *All Our Yesterdays*) as a "full-blooded Hollywood genius." While Whale had to rein in his macabre sense of humor in *Frankenstein* — we sense it just barely contained — Sir Charles Barr says that Whale "had to go to Hollywood in order to be able to tap his vein of creative fantasy."

Universal, hot on the heels of the success of *Dracula* (1931), wanted to rush *Frankenstein* into production. It was scheduled to feature Bela Lugosi as the monster and be directed by Robert Florey. But screen tests convinced the studio to find a substitute for the monster and seek another director.

According to Leslie Halliwell, Whale was a "fastidious, homosexual eccentric." He arrived at Universal with Colin Clive, *Journey's End's* star, and proceeded to transform Mary Shelley's sometimes ponderous novel

into an absolutely gripping exercise in mad science.

Reportedly, Whale saw Boris Karloff walking in the studio commissary — Karloff had appeared in such films as *The Sea Bat* (1930) and *The Mad Genius* (1931). Karloff's odd loping gait struck Whale as just right for the creature. Of course, it was Jack B. Pierce who created the staggering (and copyrighted) makeup. Jack Pierce spent three hours each day of Karloff's performance to make him 18 inches taller, 48 pounds heavier, and — with the help of shoe polish and some thick layers of paraffin over the eyes — transformed Karloff into a creature of legend and power. Clever, almost incidental touches turned Karloff into something human yet horribly alien.

According to Michael Benson's *Vintage Science Fiction Films, 1896-1949*, Pierce made the monster's extremities bloated based on research into what happens to a body after death. Jack Pierce's makeup was so believable that when we first saw the monster, we were repulsed, fascinated, and, ultimately, totally absorbed in Whale's grizzly little tale.

The film opens in a graveyard, with everything at odd angles — the fence, the gravestones, even the people. This is a world gone askew. The gravedigger throws earth over a coffin, and we hear it thud on the lid. It's a grizzly effect, and it almost makes us laugh nervously.

Henry Frankenstein, already looking like he's missed too much sleep, crouches with his helper, Fritz, ready to dig up the body. If you haven't seen *Frankenstein* in a while, this scene can be a remarkable moment. The production is physical, as if Peter Brook were staging it. This is definitely part of the so-called "Theater of Cruelty," and we

can see the influence of Max Reinhardt.

Later, they search a prisoner who's been hanged, and Fritz touches the body playfully, causing it to swing. When Henry Frankenstein examines it, he notices that the neck is broken and another brain must be found.

Off goes Fritz — to Goldstadt Medical College to rob a brain. A professor is wrapping up a lecture, pointing out two jars, one with a normal brain and another with an abnormal brain (which apparently lacks "convolutions in the frontal lobes"). After the lecture, Fritz scuttles down to snatch the brain, and one can sense Whale trying to restrain his gallows humor. But there are enough antics here. Fritz passes a hanging skeleton with something stuffed into its mouth, and a gong sounds, causing Fritz — uh oh — to drop the jar. No problem, he grins, as he picks up the abnormal brain.

We meet Henry's fiancée, Elizabeth. Her house, with its grotesque hallway, strange beams, and angles, exemplifies the out-of-kilter motif. Worried about her husband-to-be, she sets off to Castle Frankenstein with old Baron Frankenstein, the college professor, and Victor, a nondescript friend (who seems to be waiting for this little engagement to break up).

They arrive at a most inopportune time. Lightning is crackling, and Colin Clive as Henry is exulting in one of the cinema's truly great scenes. The bricks of his lab curve and twist in odd ways, the walls seem to tilt in, and just as he's about to raise the pieced-together body of the monster up to the roof, Elizabeth knocks on the door. And in hindsight we see a foreshadowing of the scene when Dorothy would knock at the gate of Oz, as Fritz says — through a small grate — "You can't see him. Go away."

They persevere, though, and arrive to see Henry raising the corpse to the roof. There's a tremendous shot of the body slowly rising upward.

When it's brought down, the hand moves. And Colin Clive writhes around, yelling, "It's alive, it's alive!" (His statement "By God, now I know what it feels like to be a god" was removed before the film's release.)

Unfortunately, the professor informs him that the brain is not quite right. Henry accepts this philosophically, saying, "Well, after all, it's only a piece of dead tissue."

Later, the bandages are removed from the monster's eyes, and the creature sees light. It's an incredible scene — his arms rise upward, he makes a low moan, and then Henry pulls him back from the light. (Danny Peary, in his *Guide for the Film Fanatic*, points out that light represents the knowledge that Henry Frankenstein tried to keep from his creation.)

Frankenstein instructs the creature to sit down for the professor, and the creature sits. We now can, thanks to MCA Video, see the first scene that was removed after the Hays Office started censoring Hollywood films in the '30s. Unnoticed, Fritz torches the creature as it reaches up to the light. The monster is chained, and Fritz comes to whip it, taunt it.

After a scene showing Fritz sticking the torch right in the creature's face, there's a quick cut. Henry Frankenstein hears a scream, and he comes to the cage and sees Fritz strung up, hanged by the enraged monster.

It's now that the monster movie begins. The creature is subdued by an injection, and Henry Frankenstein, highly overstrung, leaves the professor to watch over the monster while he goes to his fiancée and his wedding. But the professor, in another remark-

ably grizzly and powerful scene, prepares surgical utensils, clinking them together (another physical touch), bent on dissecting the drugged creature. We see the monster's eyes flutter open, his hand reach from behind, and then the professor is strangled.

The scene shifts to the festive village where everyone is preparing to celebrate the upcoming nuptials. But there are many camera shots that swoop down on the people as they enjoy their fun, as though we, the audience, were not part of the group but outsiders, the same way the monster is an outsider.

The famous scene with Maria, the little girl, is remarkable in this unexpurgated version. The young girl is at first startled by the monster, but then takes its hands — a playmate — in a scene almost identical to that near the end of *Der Golem*. In previous versions, we'd see the monster and Maria at play, tossing flowers into the water. Then later, we'd see the father walking alone, carrying her dead body. Audiences naturally assumed that the monster had killed her, and perhaps worse.

But now we see the scene, touching in its innocent pathos. They toss black-eyed Susans into the water, watching them float. Suddenly, the monster is out of flowers, and he reaches out for Maria. And he tosses her in the water, surely expecting her to float.

Then, when she drowns, we see him stricken by remorse, stumbling away, wiping his hands as if to escape the guilt and shame. He's aware that he's done something terrible and wrong. In the censored version with which we are most familiar, he becomes, after the death of the child, a true monster.

The film hastens now to its familiar end. The monster pays a visit to Henry's fiancée — a foreshadowing of Whale's *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935)

romp — and then Maria's father comes into the village, holding her body.

There is a strange dichotomy of the partying people dressed in dirndls and lederhosen and then of the father walking along carrying his dead daughter, stumbling, bleary-eyed, shocked. The scene is made more horrific and more poetic by the mythical setting of this sort of Bavarian make-believe town and the all-too realistic horror of a dead child.

The villagers split into three groups to search for the monster — the famous torch scene. Again, we are outsiders, we are not with the crowd. We are looking at the crowd, sympathizing with the creature. They climb to nearby hills, a very surreal landscape, with odd rocks and a gloomy, cloudy background. We see everyone in silhouette.

Finally, the creature meets its creator on top of the hill. It's no longer afraid of fire. It has, perhaps, learned something about existence. It knocks out Henry and retreats, rather improbably, to a Bavarian windmill. Villagers swarm around the wooden structure. The monster doesn't kill Henry but carries him away.

We then see the crowd from the monster's point of view, looking down as the villagers wave up angrily at him. Then the monster tosses Henry's body, which gets caught in the windmill's blades. The villagers set fire to the mill, and we hear the terrible cries of the monster, almost childlike in their fear and pain. The monster stumbles about and is finally trapped under a collapsing beam while the fire rages around him.

Then, almost abruptly, we're back at Frankenstein's estate, and young Frankenstein — not killed by his fall — and his wife are together as he recuperates. "Here's to a son, the House of

Frankenstein," Baron Frankenstein proposes.

The executives of Universal, surely recognizing the value of a film made for \$200,000 but that grossed \$25 million, must have also shared in that toast.

A few closing comments about *Frankenstein* (and bear with me, no other film from the '30s or '40s will be as important).

First, the connection with *Der Golem*. Whale's film, undoubtedly inspired by Paul Wegener's 1920 classic, stands on its own. The Expressionistic look raises *Frankenstein* to a magnificent level, while the creature emerges as a modern myth of enduring power. Whale screened *Der Golem* before beginning his work — the debt, especially in the scene with Maria, is obvious. But *Frankenstein* goes where no film has ever gone before. And few have since.

Universal obtained a copyright on the *Frankenstein* makeup — not on the monster, which was in public domain — but the very "look" of the makeup. It set a standard for science-fiction and horror makeup that has rarely been equaled. But it sent a signal to future filmmakers that the look of a creature — its ability to terrify and move us — was tied not only to its story, but to makeup artistry. Many filmmakers, afraid of such a standard, would hide their creatures until the final reel.

Then there's Henry's lab, with special effects by John P. Fulton and Kenneth Strickfaden's wild electrical apparatus. It showed that the set could become an important element in the film. Such grotesque labs have become a tradition, often a cliché, in the films of the '30s and '40s. It wouldn't be, in fact, until the mid-1950s that the Expressionistic look of scientific labs

would give way to other possibilities.

The theatricality of *Frankenstein*, its ghoulish physicality, is as stunning today as it was nearly 60 years ago. The film is eminently watchable, and its sensibilities clearly have effected countless filmmakers, including George Romero and Stuart Gordon (*Re-Animator* and *From Beyond*).

Frankenstein led to *Bride of Frankenstein*, a more humorous, even more bizarre film that some claim is Whale's masterpiece. But in *Frankenstein*, all the elements are in balance. The theme of extending man's knowledge into forbidden realms is enlarged in a profound way. The monster so feared is often more human, more childlike than the humanity that surrounds it.

Endless variations would be filmed.

Few with nearly as much resonance or power.

You need not worry that I'll trouble you with a detailed synopsis of *King Kong* (RKO Radio, 1933, 110 min.). Suffice it to say that if it's not already familiar to you, that's a gap in your education that's best pursued on your own. The rest of us can deal with some weightier questions.

For example, is the film even science fiction? Phil Hardy does not include it in his mammoth *Science Fiction, the Film Encyclopedia*. Michael Benson, though, features it in detail in his *Vintage Science Fiction Films*. My own opinion is that, with its focus on prehistoric creatures and subtext of some kind of time distortion on old Skull Island, *King Kong* is decidedly SF. (Like the gorilla itself, the film's influence would be, belatedly, mammoth, touching every oversized creature of the '50s, from the radioactive ants of *Them* (1954) to the dinosaur of *The Beast from Twenty Thousand Fathoms* (1953).)

That said, what is the allure of *King Kong*, the mythic pull that makes some of us watch it over and over?

For starters, like many fables, *King Kong* begins with a beautiful but poor girl — Fay Wray's Ann Darrow, who's on the skids circa 1933. There's even an apple involved. Carl Denham, desperate for an actress for his new film, saves Ann Darrow from possible arrest when she's about to steal an apple. Soon he whisks her away on an escapade that's "money, adventure, and fame, and a long sea voyage that begins at six o'clock in the morning."

So the initial, almost mythical contrast is set up — from Manhattan Island, where a beautiful hungry girl might get arrested, to Skull Island, where an even more brutal fate awaits her.

Danny Peary, never one to shrink from a daring philosophic leap, suggests that *King Kong* is "a journey through Denham's subconscious. Skull Island's expressionistic landscape — fertile, overgrown, reptile-infested, cave-filled — is Denham's fantasized sexual terrain."

Which had me choking on my popcorn. Balderdash. Intellectualization of the first order. Until I started to think about it.

And perhaps screenwriters James Creelman and Ruth Rose (not Edgar Wallace, who died before writing a word but whose name appears in the credits) set up the subconscious theme rather — er — subconsciously. As Peary points out, it does end with Kong climbing (the then) world's largest phallic symbol.

Michael Benson also suggests another psychosexual view: "He (Kong) embodies a macho ideal onto whom erotic fantasies of sexual conquest can be projected."

And perhaps the screenwriters

weren't all that unaware. Driscoll, the first mate, says to Ann Darrow, "Women can't help being a bother." Then, he adds prophetically that "I have enough troubles without having a love affair on my hands."

Too right, we say with hindsight, but it's love — unrequited to be sure — that *King Kong* is about. And finally, when the planes are gunning him down — in a tremendous scene on top of the Empire State Building — a marvelous thing happens. Max Steiner's music stops. All we hear is the ominous roar of the planes. Kong places Ann Darrow down, gently, lovingly, ready to face his death alone.

And once again, our sympathies are with the "monster" who was intruded upon, abducted, displayed as a freak show, even as it demonstrated that most rare of feelings — love.

So then, this is a film that reverberates on a number of levels. It's a fable. Timeless, dealing with our psyche in often hidden ways. And, it's a story once again of humanity reflected in the monstrous and the disturbing.

Lastly, it's a tale of love. Its hopelessness, its wonder, and, perhaps, its true nature. Like Kong, for most of us it's often beauty that can kill the beast inside.

Then there's the simple view that *King Kong* is a marvelous tale, told with a straightforward naiveté and helped with special effects that still draw admiration. As Harryhausen told me, "Merian C. Cooper [the producer] was a very gifted man, and Willis O'Brien, of course, was a marvelous artist and great technician." And it is O'Brien's marvelous stop-motion animation that makes it all work. Leslie Halliwell said, "One misjudgment on O'Brien's part, and the thing would have become a farce rather than a heart-stopping thriller."

To achieve his miracles, O'Brien used six 18-inch miniature gorillas with articulated steel skeletons. Kong's supple movements were possible, since the joints of the miniatures could be locked into position. Marcel Delgado, who also worked on the set design, created rubber muscles that stretched and flexed realistically. The models were stuffed with cotton and covered with rabbit fur.

Such are the things that dreams are made of.

There was also a full-sized head, covered with 50 bear skins, that provided the least convincing moments in the film.

O'Brien's work wasn't merely following the ground-breaking efforts of his *The Lost World* (1925). He devised a system of miniature projection by which a small image of Fay Wray, tied to the sacrificial altar, could be projected onto the miniature set, leaving no matte lines.

And while his stop-motion animation was largely ignored by filmmakers for the next 20 years, it would bloom, under Ray Harryhausen, to create some of the marvels of the 1950s — *The Beast from Twenty Thousand Fathoms* (1953), the octopus from *It Came from beneath the Sea* (1955), and the alien monster from *Twenty Million Miles to Earth* (1957). A delayed impact to be sure, but Harryhausen (who worked with O'Brien on *Mighty Joe Young* in 1949) gave life to hundreds of creatures in the '50s and '60s. (Lucasfilms would later adapt the process for its "go-motion" used in the *Star Wars* trilogy.)

Then there's Steiner's music. The music was set to be at the same pitch as the animal's growls so it would seem to echo his roars. Noted film historian Ronald Haver said that "Steiner's score for *King Kong* is a

landmark of film scoring, as much responsible for the film's success as Cooper's imagination and O'Brien's innovation."

If there is any version of the film to see, after years of scratchy TV prints, it's Criterion's laser disk, which includes, for the last two thirds of the film, a pristine print from the Library of Congress. There is a commentary on one of the stereo channels by Ronald Haver — don't worry, you can choose to just listen to the soundtrack — and a video essay featuring a massive collection of production stills.

Expurgated scenes, less crucial here than in *Frankenstein*, are also included. Mostly we see natives being stomped on, eaten by the life-size Kong head, and other more violent episodes. At first glance, *King Kong* would just seem to be an effective monster film. But it was the first monster film that played with audience sympathies and carried more than one message.

Twenty years later, every drive-in would be inundated with monsters, messages, and mayhem.

King Kong, a labor of love and genius, would stand alone.

The same year that *King Kong* was released also brought James Whale's second foray into SF, *The Invisible Man* (Universal, 1933, 71 min.). With the success of *Frankenstein*, Whale had greater control — and gave more obvious reign to his black humor.

The story, remarkably faithful to H. G. Wells's book, starts with Jack Griffin — played by Claude Rains — registering at a Hollywood version of an old English Inn, the Lion's Head. Griffin, a research scientist, has taken a drug that has rendered him invisible, and he hopes to set up a laboratory in the inn to reverse the process. He is,

of course, both wrapped in bandages and clothed to compensate for his invisibility.

Once again, there is a fiancée (Flora) who wants to find her dotty husband-to-be. In fact, Flora's father, Dr. Cranley, created the drug, Monocane, that has made Jack invisible. Cranley also knows that it has the unfortunate side effect of producing insanity.

As Griffin works to set up his lab, the locals become increasingly nosy until the innkeeper's wife, played by a screeching Una O'Connor, stumbles upon Griffin unwrapping his bandaged head. We see that it appears that he has no jaw.

Now Griffin is pursued by the locals, and, with growing dementia, plans to use his invisibility to do nothing less than rule the world. He first forces a former coworker to help him, then kills him. Griffin, now completely mad, robs a bank and a train, apparently enjoying his invisibility, before a squadron of police corner him in a snow-shrouded barn. The policemen form a square and move in close, so as not to allow him any escape.

They then set fire to the farm — and we think immediately of *Frankenstein's* ending — and they see footsteps in the snow, Griffin escaping. He is shot and his invisible body falls onto the snow.

Later, in the hospital, as Griffin dies, we see Claude Rains for the first time — first the skull, and then gradually a face appears. Claude Rains's late entrance makes you realize how much he's carried the movie on his voice alone.

Helped, of course, with special effects that are still astounding. John P. Fulton, who did some of the special effects for *Frankenstein*, created effects that have, according to Leslie Halliwell, "been widely praised." The effects of *The Invisible Man*, sitting in

an overstuffed easy chair, stealing a bicycle and peddling away, or picking up a chair and tossing it, are nothing less than superb. Michael Benson wrote: "Fulton's eye for perfection is apparent, especially when Griffin lights a cigarette held between invisible lips."

The dramatic scene at the end, with Griffin's footsteps appearing in the snow, was created by constructing a second floor below the snow, with foot shapes that could be lowered in sequence to create the impression of someone walking.

The cinematography was in the hands of another master — Arthur Edeson, who not only shot *The Lost World* but also *Frankenstein*. Edeson created a look for these and other films of the early '30s that drew on the German classics of shadow and light (like *Caligari* and *Der Golem*).

But it is the script that is the most important thing in *The Invisible Man*. Crafted by Philip Wylie and R. C. Sheriff (whom Whale brought from England), it introduced a vein of macabre humor that was completely new. Whale has the invisible man indulge in slapstick escapades at the end, dropping ink on the police chief. Food, Griffin tells a former assistant, is visible for half an hour after it's been eaten. There's also a very strange yet very English scene of the invisible man preparing for sleep, getting into his jammies, and curling up under his quilt as we hear him yawn.

Whale's direction here, though, seems at times a bit fussy and overcalculated. There's a swirl of "stage business" that's a bit distracting. And the humor, which makes the film so interesting, ultimately works against any sense of fear and suspense. *The Invisible Man* does not scare us, and we also don't feel sorry for him.

Likewise, some camera work calls attention to itself, with lots of reverse pans and zooms, as well as traveling shots. To be sure, John Ford — who favored leaving the camera in one place — did not make this film. One striking shot, looking down the staircase in the inn, is almost identical to a shot later used by Hitchcock in his masterpiece, *Psycho* (1960).

The Invisible Man would yield later sequels such as *The Invisible Man Returns* (1940), *Invisible Woman* (1941), and *Abbott and Costello Meet the Invisible Man* (1951), all making mundane use of the blue-screen process used to create “invisibility.”

Television, in its early days, also toyed with it, using it for trick shots and TV variety shows. It wasn't until 2001: *A Space Odyssey* (1968), and later *Star Wars* (1977), that the blue-screen process would come into its own — not to create invisibility, but to move masses of objects and people through alien environments. Whether it was the *Millennium Falcon* roaring through a meteor belt, or Luke Skywalker levitating a submerged fighter, the blue-screen process made the magic all work.

The Invisible Man also opens the door to some themes that Hollywood would, belatedly, explore. Danny Peary says that Rains's Jack Griffin is “one of the screen's first insane villains.” (*Variety*, in its original review of the film, described Griffin as “the strangest character yet created by the screen.”)

Rains's careful portrayal skirts the danger that such a character could become a burlesque of malevolence. The theme of the film is, once again, that there are things that man should leave alone. But the invisible man seems to suffer less from Godlike hubris than Henry Frankenstein.

And while some, like Leslie Halliwell, found the film to be “slow-moving” and “lightweight,” it remains remarkably entertaining, a significant addition to the Film Scientists Hall of Fame.

Three films, vibrant, cinema classics that are as riveting today as they were when they were first made. But what came after them?

And here's where we see the depth of the mystery. James Whale would make only one more genre film, the riotous *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), his masterpiece of grand macabre humor. The same year, Carl Freund (Fritz Lang's photographer for *Metropolis* (1926) and Carl Wegener's photographer for *Der Golem*) directed *Mad Love* (1935), a shocking tale of a love-obsessed doctor (Peter Lorre in his Hollywood debut) who grafts the hands of a guillotined murderer onto a concert musician who has lost his hands. But despite its ghoulish and suspenseful moments, *Mad Love* is more of a *Twilight Zone* entry. Such a film would also become impossible in a sanitized Hollywood of the late '30s.

Things to Come (1936) deserves mention, if only for the scope of the vision it attempts to depict. Initially scripted by H. G. Wells from his novel, *The Shape of Things to Come*, it shows the next war, circa 1940.

The virtues of *Things to Come* are few but interesting. It's certainly intriguing to think of its effect on pre-war England. It correctly prophesies the shortage of petrol. Director William Cameron Menzies, who later filmed the burning of Atlanta in *Gone with the Wind* (1939), created scenes on a massive scale that would stand unrivaled until *Forbidden Planet* (1956) and *Blade Runner* (1982). (Menzies' one classic film would be a more inti-

mate science-fiction film, the 1953 paranoid fantasy *Invaders from Mars*.)

It was England's first million-dollar film, but it is, says Leslie Halliwell, "dreadfully long." And Danny Peary adds that "Oswald Cabal, the visionary hero, sounds today like a lunatic."

Even H. G. Wells himself reportedly disliked it.

And of the '40s?

To be sure there's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1941), featuring Spencer Tracy's portrayal of the title roles sans makeup. "Which one is he now," Somerset Maugham was reported to have said one day while visiting the set. MGM purchased the 1932 version to prevent it from being re-released and competing with its version. The earlier version remains today unavailable on video.

In 1945, Republic released the remarkable serial *The Purple Monster Strikes*, notable for its ridiculous dialogue (an alien lands and says to an onlooker: "My name would mean nothing to you. I come from a planet you people call Mars"). With an even more ridiculous plot, it quickly degenerates into a typical goofy cliffhanger show with the alien just another criminal.

Yet this alien can enter and possess another human — a theme that would become a dominant theme in the McCarthy-era '50s. It was also one of the first films featuring an invasion by an alien.

The simple fact remains that none of the early classics of the '30s led to even more dramatic films in the '40s. The reason, on reflection, is obvious.

Frankenstein, *King Kong*, and *The Invisible Man* represent a synthesis of European actors, stories, techniques, and themes. Once transplanted to Hollywood, they could be cloned, copied, and re-used (as Universal did

with *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*), but not, alas, developed beyond the original theme. By the '40s, each succeeding *Frankenstein* film would become weaker and weaker.

Such versions would end with Abbott and Costello's meeting Frankenstein's monster (1948). It is their best film — and the monster's last hurrah. And it clearly tells the story of how the Hollywood studio system handled SF. *Uncomfortably* is perhaps the best word.

And of *King Kong*? With the intervention of producer David O. Selznick, Willis O'Brien's personal project titled "Creation" (about a lost island of dinosaurs) was matched with Merian Cooper's personal vision of an adventure story, to create a unique film. But did it inspire a wave of other films, about giant monsters on the loose?

Not at all. *Son of Kong* — quickly and cheaply made — fizzled limply. It wouldn't be until 20 years later that that particular bandwagon of giant creatures would get going, with everything from caterpillars to an octopus.

There are, quite simply, fewer science-fiction films from the years 1941 to 1946 than from 1931 to 1936 (and many of those "SF features" were serials, featuring Captain Marvel or Dick Tracy). The global war (predicted by *Things to Come*) obviously signaled that the "future was here," so perhaps filmmakers shied away from any thoughtful science-fiction films. Also, the government and Hollywood were eager to promote victory through films, and so another genre, the war film, blossomed.

Escapism continued, as it did during the latter years of the Great Depression, with screwball comedies and musicals. But with the future of the world very much in doubt, it was

perhaps not commercial to speculate about it.

Fritz Lang moved on to dark suspense thrillers. James Whale left movies completely. Cooper and Schoedsack would together only produce *Mighty Joe Young* in 1947.

Perhaps, though, if producer Carl Laemmle, Jr. (who was responsible for *Frankenstein* and *The Invisible Man*) had kept interested in the field, other science-fiction masterpieces might have been produced.

Which leads to the obvious question.

What happened in the '50s to make the SF explosion begin?

But that mystery will have to wait for another time.

Some comments:

The most disappointing loss is *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1932). While it still can be seen as a film, it is not legitimately available on videotape.

Mad Love is also not available, but is shown quite frequently on public TV (and is definitely worth catching).

Other films that resisted my extensive efforts to locate legitimate sources include *Dr. Cyclops* (1940), *Strange Holiday* (1945), and, the one I hoped to find, *Perfect Woman* (1949). This is all the more disappointing as these are all 1940s films.

Good sources for other films listed, besides sources listed in the last installment of "Science Fiction on Video," are as follows.

Facets Multimedia Inc. (1517 West Fullerton Avenue, Chicago IL 60614) is a unique mail-order and rental service, which is excellent for UK and other foreign material.

New Video (276 Third Avenue, New York NY 10010) has an extensive and

interesting catalogue of all the films it sells.

MCA Home Video (70 Universal City Plaza, Universal City CA 91608) offers *Frankenstein* and *Bride of Frankenstein*, both on tape and laser disk. The disk versions, featuring photo-still collections on side two, are breathtaking in their clarity.

Criterion's (2139 Manning Avenue, Los Angeles CA 90025) *King Kong*, as noted, is reason enough to pick up a laser-disk player (and we haven't even seen *Blade Runner* or *2001* on disk yet, with digital sound).

There are many key books for reading about films of this era, and some of the best are listed below.

Vintage Science Fiction Films, 1896-1949 (McFarland) offers brief, but excellent background on every science-fiction film for the years indicated.

Science Fiction, Horror and Fantasy Film and Television Credits by Harris M. Lenz III (McFarland) is an excellent reference volume for anyone trying to find out who did what, when and where.

Halliwell's Hundred by the always interesting Leslie Halliwell (Scribners) offers his personal choice of 100 films, including *The Invisible Man* and *King Kong*. Also by Halliwell is *The Dead that Walk* (Grafton Books), his detailed and eminently readable coverage of *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, and *The Mummy*.

Guide for the Film Fanatic by Danny Peary (Fireside Books) is just as described, offering Peary's comments on his selection of key films.

Lastly, *All Our Yesterdays*, edited by Charles Barr (BFI Publishing) is a thorough history of 90 years of British cinema. ●

ANOTHER PLACE **by Elissa Malcohn** **art: Terry Lee**

*The author works as a staff assistant for the News and Information Office at the Harvard Business School, and she also serves as editor of Star*Line, newsletter of the Science Fiction Poetry Association.*

Her fiction and poetry have appeared in Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, in a poetry anthology entitled Burning with a Vision (Owlswick Press), and in numerous small-press magazines. This is her first fiction sale to Amazing® Stories, and she informs us that the local color for this tale was taken from a personal journal kept while she traveled in Quito, Ecuador, in 1984.

Diego Martinez lived in the center of the Earth, and Mina Inagua visited him from heaven. That was what Mina was fond of saying.

She came down from the mountains and a small town dug into granite and serviced by a two-lane road. A general store in a dilapidated wood frame, a gas station, and a bar comprised downtown TexCity, known to the locals as Little Alamo. Beyond the red CEPE-Textaco sign there lay a small line of pastel-painted houses. Past them, blued light hung in the distance over the Pichincha volcano's dormant peaks, home of Lagrula Observatory and its blanched dome. Haze settled around lesser peaks, cupping sun rays in myriad lakes and valleys. Always, there was blue haze in the inter-Andean valley, after morning fog faded from the mountaintops.

Dressed in a paisley shift and leather-thong sandals, Mina wound her way down blind curves, passing sparse mountain grasses and an occasional field of pyrethrum "daisies" picked by Indian women bent intently over the flowers. When she reached the entrance to the Atahualpa Iron Mine, she donned a yellow hardhat and a blue denim jacket over her dress, and joined the men of TexCity and mestizos from Quito in a boxcar. When they parted company, she continued on, to a small laboratory three miles underground.

There, Diego Martinez sat, hunched before his terminal. Mina could follow the rainbows on his face until he looked up, away from his screen, and smiled at her.

"I brought you a sandwich," she said, reaching into a denim pocket. A mashed triangle of bread and cold cuts appeared in her thin brown hand. "Sometimes I think I make my walk down from the summit and ride the rest just to make sure you eat."

"And here I thought a condor brought you down to the mine." Martinez

took the sandwich and placed it on his desk. He stood and hugged her. "How do you know when I haven't stocked the fridge?"

"It's when you know I'm coming." She walked past columns swathed in diagrams and glanced back behind her. Diego had returned to his terminal. Mina smiled and continued past coiled wires riotous with color until, hidden by air conditioning vents and computers, she found a small woodgrain-design refrigerator. It held bottled water and a block of cheddar cheese. "Just as I thought," she murmured.

Mina cast shadows as she walked. Light in the lab was scarce. Minimal glare competed with illuminated information on the screens. She nodded to an assistant who consulted a printout tacked to a wall. Diego's sandwich remained untouched as he checked, then discarded schematic representations of particle trajectories one after another.

Mina's love was the stars. Diego loved iron slabs, or rather what was inside them — seen with the help of software and streamer tubes. Beyond his spine curved now into a question mark, a cube of iron plates gaudy with wires and flashing lights lined the wall. Fifty kilotons of iron: 10^{34} protons and neutrons.

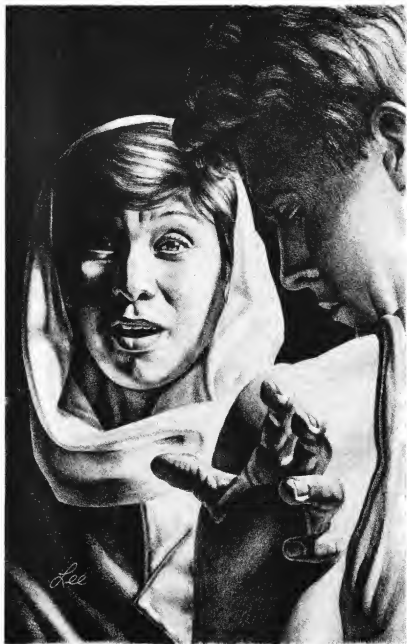
The day a proton decayed, Diego would trace the trajectories of its sub-particles, still unknown in number, and find that it had burst open like a piñata scattering presents of light. Mina gazed upon the tonnage of iron, every inch of it sandwiched between and monitored by the tubes: a miniature city, a kingdom of protons. Three miles of earth above her did not weigh upon her as heavily as the slabs pressed against the wall. Such density, such enormous weight, all to contain a particle invisible to her that might be destined to simply disintegrate.

Madre mia, she thought. *How many angels can vanish from the head of a pin?*

Mina slept on a cot in the lab, after sponging down by a ceramic basin of water. Her toothpaste was made with Cotopaxi volcanic ash. Her nightdress and blanket were where she had left them, in a cardboard box under a table dripping with printouts. Love of the task precluded modesty, as did the closed confines of an underground cave. This particular task had gone on for a decade. Lab assistants, many of them students from Quito's Polytechnic Institute, came and went; Diego had been here since the project's inception.

He and his assistants passed the sleeping woman with her long black braid curled atop cotton with no more than a cursory glance. No doubt Mina was dreaming of telescopes; Diego knew that when he stayed at the observatory, he dreamt of the lab. He brought a sandwich to the summit then, and teased her that she should stop sending cosmic rays down his way to screw up his data.

Now another one had set the streamer tubes off. No proton decay, just a



straight trail shooting through the iron assembly like a microscopic bolide. Perhaps two per hour; the miles of rock overhead provided good shelter from cosmic rays. Still, Diego had logged thousands.

They had met in Quito's Parque La Alameda. Mina had grown up in Silicon Valley and Diego in Hoboken, New Jersey. They had both ended up in Ecuador, the site of South America's first colonial observatory five centuries earlier, and the world's first equator-based proton-decay experiment a decade ago. Lagrula Observatory, where Mina Inagua spent most of her nights, was descended from the small peach-colored house edged in filigreed maroon trim and Spanish arches that sat in Parque La Alameda. The little house was one of the few observatories she had seen that exhibited a line of wash hanging out back.

A statue in the park, devoted to the French Geological Survey of 1899-1908, bore twin telescopes on the sides of a pyramid. A rooster stood at its apex, poised for flight with an armillary sphere on its back. Diego Martinez, slung with cameras and a notebook, had read an inscription over the shoulder of a bronze, life-sized robed woman: "En honor de las Misiones Geodésicas Francesas."

"Amen," Mina had said, before she could stop herself.

They'd peeked at each other in surprise, the bronze woman and her pyramid between them. Mina took one look at Diego's cameras and said, "You're a tourist."

"No. I'm a physicist."

"Same thing." She made a whizzing motion with her palm. "Particles, you know. Just passing through." She grinned.

His eyes widened, making his broad face appear broader. He took in her thick black hair draped around the shoulders of her dress. "And you're a Nobel Laureate masquerading as a peasant."

"Nobel Laureate in training, please." She extended her hand. "Mina. I'm an astronomer, 'reassigned' here from Cerro Tololo — that is, after the riots. And I learned to dress like a peasant in Berkeley."

"Diego." They shook hands. "So, you are not a local. Not a tourist either."

Mina shook her head. "An exile is more like it. We were studying Eta Carinae, before the fall of Santiago. Our four-meter telescope — it's got a twin in Tuscon — was blown to bits." She tried to smile. "Do you know what you can do to a perfect, parabolic mirror that big, with plastic explosives?"

"Anyone killed?" he asked softly.

"Thank heavens, no." She corrected herself. "Not at the observatory. Plenty of people killed outside." She nodded toward the Andes that stood to either side of Quito like lines of sentinels. "From here, Carina barely grazes the horizon, but it's enough. Eta shows signs of an impending supernova."

She shook her head. "Too bad Chile exploded first."

"So you decided to continue your work here and not in South Africa."

Mina threw her head back and laughed.

"Well, you're looking for an explosion."

"Yes, but far, far away. And you?"

Diego smiled. "I'm looking for disintegration."

"You came to the right place."

They took Avenue Diez de Agosto and cut to Amazonas in time for Quito's midday rain. Ducking inside a diner called Mario's, they shared cappuccino and pineapple against a backdrop of songs from the American Hit Parade. Diego warmed his hands around a chipped ceramic cup; at nine thousand feet the temperature dropped into the fifties with the onset of wind and showers. He was accustomed to the heat generated underground, used to the battery of air conditioners humming against rock. Mina, who craved high elevations and opened domes in the dead of night, seemed not to mind the chill.

"It's funny," she mused, skewering a piece of pineapple on a toothpick. "Eta could go tomorrow, or in ten thousand years. There was always the concern we might be looking at the wrong star, that maybe Betelgeuse would light up the sky instead. We never stopped to think we might be looking at the wrong politics."

"But you're still watching the same star?"

Mina nodded.

"A proton has thirty-two modes of decay," Diego said. "For all I know, I might have spent a decade watching for the wrong ones." His toothpick landed by hers. "So much for blind faith."

"So much for theory. I can only assume what Eta's age is, how fast it's burning."

"My protons are older than your stars," he said deadpan.

"Big man."

"Have to be . . . they're little protons."

Mina laughed.

They struck a deal, then. Once in a while, Mina would show Diego the heavens and the small, sharp lines of stellar spectra. He would show her the dances of particles. They would introduce each other to their first loves, and remember always to bring sandwiches. Continuing down Avenue Nueve de Octubre after the rains, they found Quito's Science and Technology bookstore placed incongruously among honky-tonk record stores and souvenir shops, and lingered there until closing time. They took a rickety bus to the mountains and hugged each other good-bye; and Mina rose to heaven, while Diego returned to the netherworld.

Diego's blankets were piled inside a cardboard box by one of the photomultipliers at Lagrula Observatory. Diego's colleagues — those using water-

filled detectors — used photomultipliers to spot light emitted from charged particles. They needed to see a spark as bright as that from an ordinary flashbulb seen at the distance of the Moon. Mina had used the same instrument to view a star in the Andromeda galaxy — before Cerro Tololo.

Diego took a wadded sandwich from his shirt pocket when he arrived, and presented it to her. Mina took it from his hand and placed it in a silver refrigerator, on a shelf underneath canisters of film. The 100-inch Cassegrainian, “the oil-money project” as the people of TexCity called it, hummed quietly on its clock drive as Mina’s assistants periodically checked prints of emission lines. The Cassegrainian, from its height on Pichincha, was actually tilted downward rather than up and aimed at stars that, from the foot of the Andes, were already below the horizon.

She had pointed out the lines in one spectrographic print after another. “See? These are carbon lines. Eta Carinae’s been converting itself into heavier elements. This red shift here means the star’s thrown off a shell of itself; we’ve been watching that expand outward.”

Diego, throwing off waves of heat in the surrounding cold, reached for a blanket and draped himself in it. “And then it collapses into still heavier elements.”

“Yes. And then it throws off another shell, and collapses again. Pretty soon — a few thousand years, maybe — it gets tired of collapsing and blows itself to smithereens.”

“You’re hoping it will be tomorrow?”

“Or tonight. Or tomorrow night. Not tomorrow.” Mina grinned. “We’re constrained by the sun up here in these parts. You moles are lucky down there; you get to go a full twenty-four hours through all the seasons. We have to follow the stars; your particles go down and visit *you*. I’m jealous.”

Diego positioned himself on a cot and let the sounds of humming and the riffling of papers lull him to sleep. He had swathed himself in thermal underwear including a tubular hood, and heaped a cocoon of blankets around himself. He twitched in his sleep — as though a subatomic particle had whizzed through him and he was sensitive enough to detect it and respond.

In the morning he rolled awake in cold, brisk air as Mina pushed the button that rolled the dome’s doors on their metal tracks. His eyes were open as the doors shut with a heavy, final sigh. Mina was bent over photos and coordinates, with signs of tiredness just beginning to ring her eyes, although her eyes were still bright. She did not see Diego as he sat up on his cot and shivered; he dared not disturb her.

Finally, she looked up as Diego pulled woolen slippers over thermal-clad feet. “Good morning.”

“Yawn.” He padded to a kitchenette by the refrigerator. “I could use a cup of that good Ecuadoran coffee.”

“Ecuador exports its coffee. There’s instant Savarin by the kettle.” Mina saw her assistants smile. It did not matter that the two of them had been say-

ing the same things to each other for years — whenever Diego visited the observatory or Mina descended into the mountain. Cosmic rays and carbon lines became repetitious. No reason why human interaction should not do the same.

Diego's assistants smiled, too, when months later Mina walked once again into their laboratory, reached into her denim pocket, and said, "I brought you a sandwich. Sometimes I make my walk down from the summit and ride the rest just to make sure you eat."

"And here I thought a condor brought you down to the mine."

They hugged each other. When Mina disengaged from Diego, her small brown hand passed through his shoulder. She stared at her fingers.

Diego hadn't noticed. "What's wrong?"

"I'm seeing things."

"That's why we have assistants. 'Seeing things' is an occupational hazard. What did you see?"

"I saw my hand pass through your shoulder."

Diego nodded. "That's one of the more unusual ones."

Mina reached out and brushed his shoulder with her hand. Her fingers disappeared inside it and reappeared as she withdrew. Diego followed her hand with his eyes; Mina saw them widen. "What did that feel like?"

"Like a light touch. What did you feel?"

"Air. Emptiness. Patricio," she called to one of the assistants. "Come over here, please."

A young man from the Polytechnic Institute strolled over.

"Brush Diego's right shoulder with your fingers."

He did. They passed through flesh and bone as through air. Patricio cursed under his breath in Spanish.

"Flex that shoulder," she told Diego.

"No problem there. Feels solid to me," he said.

"It *looks* solid."

Impulsively, Diego grasped Mina's fingers with his hand. Warm flesh enclosed warm flesh; if Diego concentrated hard enough, he could feel her pulse. It was racing. "Yours or mine," he murmured.

"Yours or mine what?"

"Never mind." He released her hand. "What about the other shoulder?"

Mina grasped his left shoulder and felt slightly muscled flesh under a cotton shirt. She placed her palm against his chest and pushed until she felt his sternum. "Good. I always preferred solid evidence to intangibles."

"I'd feel guilty if I couldn't give you a good hug."

They stared at each other and swallowed hard in unison. Finally, Diego whispered, "I'd better get back to my terminal. See if a proton disappears before I do."

* * *

"We've got to get you to a hospital," she said.

"No."

"Diego —"

"I've been watching protons for ten years. They are not confined to a sick-bed and can move about as they please. I am not about to be confined either." He glanced up at rock. "Other than in my favorite cell." He grinned.

"*Desaparecido*," Mina bit off the word. "You think that just because people are disappearing in Chile you can do the same? *They* want to escape from their prison camps and be *found*!"

"I *am* found," he said mildly. "Right here. I am doing what I love to do. How many other people can say the same?"

She stormed away and faced the iron cube. "Stubborn, immovable goat!" she whispered. Behind her, Diego chortled. "Damn echoes."

"They can't cure me, Mina," he said softly.

She didn't turn. "How do you know?"

"Who else disappears like this?"

"At least go in for tests!"

"How can they test? *What* can they test? This isn't a disease, it's a matter of physics. We are studying it here with extra equipment."

"Sacrificing yourself to science, I see."

"As always." He went back to his terminal. Mina heard the riffling of printouts and knew that Diego was fanning them for her benefit.

She grabbed Patricio by the shoulder. "You were his student," she whispered urgently. "Doesn't this disturb you?"

Patricio frowned. "I've seen Diego removed from this place before," he said. "Not when he visits you; that's different, and only for a night. Whenever he is called away — even for a conference within the discipline — he dies more than a little. He is right; a laboratory or a hospital staff would not let him out of its sight until it performed all of its tests and tried all of its treatments. He would die from that sooner than he would disappear. And," Patricio added, "he is a fatalist. Perhaps a man of faith."

Mina snorted. "Then he sees proton decay — and his — as an act of God."

"He doesn't say." The young man shrugged. "He doesn't cross himself before he starts his work."

Her nails dug into his arm. "How do *you* feel?"

He glanced at the place where her hold left white crescents. "Respectful," he said. "Sad. Hopeful. I'm not afraid, and I don't know why. What else is there?"

"There's rage," she said, under her breath.

Mina dreamt, as always, of the observatory. Lines and lines of red-shifted carbon; her assistants passed to her sheaves of data at a time. Accentuated in the extreme contrast of light that comes in dreams, the figure of Diego on the cot was swathed in its cocoon of blankets until neither head nor feet protruded. The

thin mattress of the cot curved up, like the curve of a parabolic mirror, cupping him.

Mina knew the lines in Eta Carinae's spectrum like the lines in Diego's face. Laugh lines, tired lines, carbon lines. Heavy elements and wispy, expanding shells of light; a bright star doing a fast burn. The lines expanded in her hand, crossed those in her palm, and lengthened. They thickened into slabs of iron and aligned themselves into a cube surrounded by mountain rock.

Mina saw a cocoon of blankets balanced on a chair, inert, surrounded by frenzied assistants checking proton-decay data with the speed of an accelerated film. Patricio almost knocked the cocoon to the floor, then grabbed and straightened it. Before she could think, Mina was at the refrigerator, grabbing the knife by the block of cheese. She rushed to the cocoon, slit it from top to bottom, and opened it up — to find it hollow.

She startled in her sleep, rolled hard, and hit the floor. Her ankle clanged against metal tubing, and she slapped her hand over her mouth to squelch a yell.

Diego was by her side. "Are you all right?"

"Damn it, yes. I dreamt you had vanished."

"I am vanishing. Dreams are supposed to be symbolic." He put a finger to his lips as Mina stared at him. "I'm scared as hell, too," he whispered. "But I don't understand it, and I can't deny it, and I can't let it stop me. You've got to do what you love — si?"

"Si," Mina said. She frowned.

"If you were disappearing, I'd do the same for you."

They hugged each other around the waist. Diego stood and walked back to his terminal. Mina, still on her knees, watched him as he bent back to his work. Then she clasped her hands atop her mattress, rested her forehead against them, and whispered a prayer.

In the morning she pulled on a robe and said, "I could use some of that good Ecuadoran coffee."

"Ecuador exports its coffee," Diego said from a column of printouts. "There's instant Savarin by the fridge."

Mina padded over to the column and gazed at the printout. "That's different from the others."

"It's a measure of the density of elements in my shoulder," he said. "They're lighter elements."

"Your protons are decaying."

"Hard to tell. There aren't any actual products of decay."

"Have you looked for them?"

"We've trained a few detectors on me, yes."

"And you've found no decay particles."

"None. At the least, we should have detected a few mesons."

"They're staying in the mesonic lodge."

"Patricio," Diego called, "please get Ms. Inagua a cup of coffee. Make it

strong.”

“With or without liqueur?”

“With. Me, too. Thanks,” he said, as Patricio handed them a pair of mugs. Diego warmed his palms on the rounded ceramic and sipped. He and Mina walked to the cot, sat down.

“We’ll be taking regular readings, with our equipment, of my condition,” Diego told her. “All else aside, I feel fine.”

“Will you be able to detect any spreading?”

“A simple touch will do that.”

Mina breathed in the aroma of spiked, instant coffee and took a deep draught. The alcohol sent a shiver through her. “Diego,” she said, slowly, “I never felt as though I was losing you to your work. You’ve introduced me to it as to a friend — a lover, even.” She looked up, into his eyes. “Perhaps what makes this so hard for me is to feel your work — and all of us — might simply be losing you.”

Diego leaned over and kissed her on the forehead. “We’ll take it one day at a time,” he said. “We’ll take whatever measurements need to be taken; it hasn’t become an inconvenience yet. And if it does,” he asserted, “an inconvenience is all it will ever be.”

“I brought you a sandwich,” Diego said, at the observatory.

Mina watched him as he hooked his left elbow and reached into his left breast pocket with his left hand. The other rested half in, half out of his right pants pocket, bisected by cloth.

“As hard as you can — but not too hard,” he told her as she hugged him hello. He felt wraithlike in her arms. “Any explosive news lately?”

“None yet. All I’ve got is a place full of ‘carbon paper.’”

“If you’ve extra heavy elements, I could use a few.”

“You’re welcome to them.” She pointed to the Cassegrainian. “But it’s a long walk.”

Diego retired to his cot and slept until morning, then napped as Mina slept from six until noon. Wrapped in his blankets, he sat with coffee and papaya, letting his right arm dangle through a cot that felt like air. *An illusion*, he thought. *You’re the one that’s vanishing, and everything else feels as if it’s going away.*

He tiptoed to Mina, who had stretched out on the floor by her table with a pillow under her breasts. She was still fully dressed in jeans and a sweater, arm reaching out, beyond the pillow, to point in the direction of the Cassegrainian. Diego knelt quietly and passed his right hand through her.

She opened her eyes. He startled. “Did you feel that?”

“Feel what?”

“My hand.”

She shook her head. “No. Why?”

“I just passed it through you. You woke up, just at that moment.”

"I might have heard your approach subliminally and awakened from that."

"I'm disappearing and you're arguing causation."

"Either way you put it, it means I felt your presence. Does that make you feel better?"

"Yes."

"Good. I'm going back to sleep."

Mina plumped the pillow under her cheek and closed her eyes. Diego waited silently, then passed his hand through her again.

She murmured, eyes still closed, "It feels like a very thin breeze. Like heat rising in summer."

"Where did you feel it?"

"Just under my right shoulder blade."

"That's accurate."

"Place your left hand there."

Diego did and touched flesh under nightgown. "This hand's still solid."

"I know." Impulsively, Mina lifted herself up and kissed him on the lips. Her hand grazed his cheek. Diego threw a quick glance at one of the assistants bent over a table.

"They took bets," Mina whispered quickly. "Six to one against, and in this business you've got to like long shots." She kissed him again. "The prize is oil money, so it's a good bet."

Diego grinned. "You're capitalizing on my condition."

"No. I'm showing you I care in a very emotional way. *They're* capitalizing on your condition."

He kissed her back. "I'm glad you explained it to me."

They took a rickety bus down to Quito and walked to the Church of San Francisco after the rains. Wized vendors the color of deep mahogany filled its outer steps with shawls, candles, and household goods for sale. An Indian mother and her children slept, barefoot, in an alcove. Gold leaf on a pair of thick wooden doors had dulled to red, and cherubs' wings were edged in rust colors.

"This church was originally built with no doors," Mina said. "And the altar was made completely of mirrors because it was a new thing to the Incas at the time." Her arm traced an arc beside a rainbow-colored shawl. "Light would enter freely, and its reflection off the altar would dazzle the Indians. I like that," she said. "Altars made of mirrors."

"You would," Diego laughed. "Yours is."

"Damn right. Imagine — a church filled with sunlight coming at you from all directions."

"Ashes to ashes, dust to light."

"Your theory."

"Of course."

"I prefer soup to nuts, myself." She slipped her arm around his waist, and

felt a slight breeze as he rested his arm around her. "You're holding that outward."

"It would look strange otherwise. I'd sink into you."

"How are things going downstairs?"

"I'm thankful for single-key commands," he said. "It's hard enough going from being a two-finger to a one-finger typist. Other than that and the spread of my affliction . . . no news."

They walked down winding, narrow cobbled streets in the Colonial section, toward a mountain with its great wooden and winged Virgin of Quito. Cramped quarters and rusted iron balustrades hung above them until they reached the main square. There, they found vaulted gold domes and palm trees, and the Presidential House surrounded by guards armed with bayonets. Everywhere there were peddlers. A small boy selling lottery tickets brushed through Diego's arm and took no notice.

They sat in Parque El Ejico, in the shade of a eucalyptus tree and watched a spirited volleyball game ringed and cheered by an exclusively male audience.

"There's no demarcation line," Mina said softly, leaning against Diego. "You just get progressively more solid as I lean farther in."

"Don't fall in altogether. I'd have to do contortions to pull you out with my good arm, and we might disrupt the game."

"I doubt it." She straightened. "They're quite preoccupied."

They hugged each other good-bye, carefully, in front of the bus. It raised a shower of dust as it took off for the Atahualpa Iron Mine. Mina let her eyes tear; better to think it came from the ambient grit.

"Funny," she heard herself whisper to a receding bumper, "you don't look like Eurydice."

A month later, she could see Diego's keyboard through his back.

"Can you still eat a sandwich?" she asked.

"I think so."

There was a crutch by Diego's terminal. He grasped it with his left hand and used it, with his left foot, to raise himself. "Stay back," he said. "If my left side is going to go, I want to be able to do this for as long as I can." Jerkily, he advanced toward her.

"Maybe the process will reverse itself."

"Maybe. Maybe not." He propped the crutch in his armpit and caressed Mina's cheek with his left hand. "One day at a time."

"What do the detectors say?"

"About the iron? Or about me?"

"Whatever."

"The iron remains solid, and I continue to disappear. It's all being logged. How goes Eta Carinae?"

"Still there. Still heavy."

"And the shell game?"

"Still expanding. I've been logging things, too, but the spectrograph's taken all my best lines."

Diego laughed. "Don't ever stop," he whispered.

"I won't. You, too."

"Me, too." He grasped his crutch and turned. Patricio and the other assistants bustled about him, examining printouts, sheets tacked to the columns, the arrays of flashing lights. For once, the refrigerator was stocked with food.

Of course, Mina thought. He can't leave now. Even for a day.

Gazing through his back in the dim light, Mina saw Diego's left hand, through translucence, peck commands out on the keyboard. One by one he discarded neutrinos, cosmic rays, and other noncandidates for proton decay. He had balanced himself on the seat; his right arm dangled through it. His right calf partially engulfed a chair leg.

She strode to a set of printouts on a large board leaning against the stone wall. Over time, she had learned to read them. She bent, side by side with Diego's assistants, checking and double-checking, tracing particle trajectories to their sources. Looking for the right emitted particles shooting in the right directions.

The night progressed and her cot remained empty. The team took down one set of printouts and tacked up another. Mina progressed to those on the columns. At three in the morning the bustling had become a quiet padding, and sheets were riffled more slowly. Still no decay was detected. Nothing to explain Diego's disappearing, nothing to say: look, all the random protons destined to vanish have come to rest in Diego Martinez. He is your empirical evidence. He is your proof.

Nothing of the sort.

Mina looked up, past miles of rock, toward the heavens. Toward the sky where Eta Carinae lay bloated and unstable, ridding itself of itself. *What is it, she asked herself, that makes us devote our lives to waiting for the things we love the most to die?*

Not sunrise but the whistle of a teakettle heralded the morning. Mina, surprised, found herself rising from her cot, her pillow grasped and held to her in sleep. Above her stood Martinez, listing more to the left now on his crutch. She looked up into his eyes — one black, one rock-colored. "When did I fall asleep?"

"About two hours ago." His voice possessed a slight echo, as though traveling to her from far away. "Patricio found you, unconscious and hugging a column. He had to get to the data, so he carried you to the cot."

Mina stood, and swayed slightly. "No, don't move the crutch; I'm just a little tired." She rested her hand lightly on Diego's still-solid shoulder. "I will need to leave soon."

"I know."

"I will miss you terribly."

"I know." He smiled. "I'll miss you, too."

"Don't let one proton slip through your fingers."

"Don't be blinded by the light."

"I won't," she grinned. Then she said, "You're all phosphor."

"It's my terminal."

"I know." Her left hand covered his, around the dowel of the crutch.
"Good-bye, luv."

"Good-bye." He released the dowel, turned his palm up, and squeezed her hand tightly. She turned and made her way out past the laboratory door.

Diego Martinez returned to his terminal and balanced himself on the chair. Soon he was seeing the pixels on his screen enlarged. Eye fatigue, he told himself. Seeing things.

His left index finger reached toward the ESCAPE key, and passed through it.

The death of Diego Martinez, Mina Inagua read, was attributed to "natural causes." In a related story, significant evidence of proton decay had been reported by the lab at the Atahualpa Iron Mine. Exactly how the stories were related, the text did not say.

She nodded to herself, placed the newspaper down on a chair, and hugged herself where she stood. Her Cassegrainian, inert during the day, rested on its struts at the apex of its dormant volcano.

She took the bus down to Quito and walked to Parque La Alameda. New wash hung on the line behind the old observatory. Out by the street, a statue of General Sucre remained poised for battle on its bronze horse.

The bronze woman was still ascending the steps to the Geological Survey pyramid behind the observatory. She leaned on its face as intently as she always had. Her bare foot, exposed daily to the Quito rains, showed from beneath her floor-length robe.

"En honor de las Misiones Geodésicas Francesas," Mina read, "Mediciones de Arcos Meridianos Ecuatoriales, Siglo XVIII, Siglo XX."

She reached out and touched the woman's hand that perpetually inscribed, but never completed, the final X.

"We're not so different, you and I," Mina whispered to the statue. "We keep trying — and do not stop what we are doing until we are finished, and it is done."

She turned and walked to the Church of San Francisco, entering past faded gilt-edged doors. She walked past plain wooden benches and lit a candle. She dropped sucre coins into a cup. She lit another candle, and another. She emptied her purse, giving sures to the women and children living in the alcoves, to the vendors out on the steps, to the street peddlers, to the panhandlers. The mirrors in the church had long been taken away, and what

remained was the glass-enclosed casket of Santa Maria de Jesús, patron saint of Ecuador. Her silver casket, and her guitar.

Mina wanted to open the doors wide, and in her mind they flung themselves far off their hinges and vanished. She saw before her the ancient altar of mirrors, each one reflecting candle after candle and sun after sun, stars multiplied and blazing. Blinding light breaching every crack in every pew, filling the church with lumens, galaxies, novas. She felt a breeze, a solar wind wrapping her in gauzy waves. She was carried in reflection compounded on reflection, the altar reversing the sky and placing her in a bowl of blue and gold. Tears cascaded into the bowl, gleamed like diamonds, like Incan jewels.

She left the church, guarding herself against pickpockets. She caught her bus and ascended the Andes in the climb toward TexCity and Lagrula Observatory. Blue haze began to settle in the inter-Andean valley as the sun set.

Her assistants were waiting for her. She hugged them, one by one. Then she went to her console, pushed a button, and opened up the dome. ●

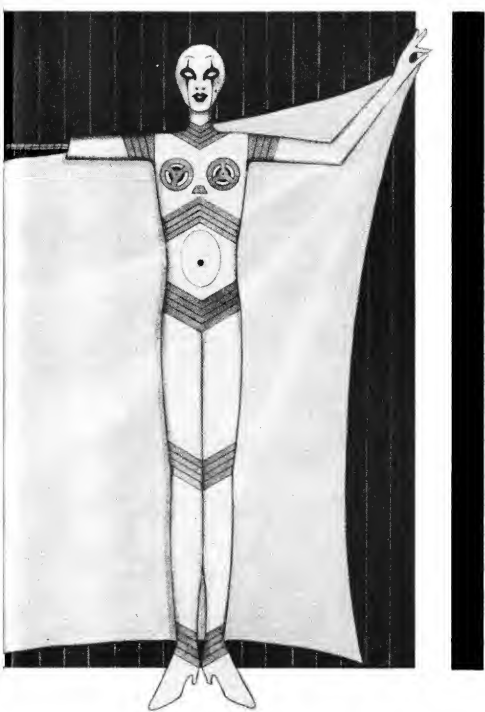
TIME FRACTURE

My craft so silent with no running lights
It plots a stark path
Through the sunless nights
Seeking the center
It is found everywhere
Distance can't be measured
There's no room for error
The familiar recedes
Ere the cold empty stare
Of eyeless dark planets
So pitted and bare
Speeding projections
Of themselves disappear
When was the moment
I visited here
All is now now is never
I hang helplessly
Suspended above
Infinity.

— Chris Harold Stevenson



SATIN
by Ron Goulart
art: Roger Raupp



He had no idea he was going to fall in love with a woman who was, from his point of view, one hundred and seventy years old. In fact, as Ken Boothby paced his glazwalled Manhattan office on that calm and clear mid-day in 2084, he had no premonition he was going to fall in love with anybody. He was arguing with his time machine.

"You've got to cease," Ken said, waving his fistful of memos, pixphone message slips, and official forms at the bulky chrome-plated robot, "stop, quit. You keep doing this sort of thing, and TTOC is going to —"

"The Time Travel Overseeing Commission is staffed with unimaginative twerps," pointed out Tempo-207, who was reclining on the neowicker sofa, metallic hands locked behind his silvery humanoid head, and gazing out at the towers and interlacing pedways of the great city. "Take, for example, my recent quick jaunt to ancient Greece. Aristophanes told me my idea of adding a chorus of dancing girls to his plays was a doozy. He went so far as —"

"Aristophanes? TTOC doesn't even know about that unauthorized temporal excursion." Ken checked through his collection of recent complaints. "You keep this up, Tempo, and they're going to revoke our Time Salvage Permit. That'll put Chronic Collectibles, Inc., out of business." He gestured at a neowood door across the large oval office. "Willis and I have worked like —"

"What's the use of living if you never stop to smell the roses?"

"Yeah, and that's another thing." Ken produced a memo from his batch, waved it. "A TTOC overseer spotted you picking flowers in the Garden of Eden. You know damn well you aren't even supposed to go near that —"

"I needed a bouquet to —"

"For what? To hand to H. G. Wells when you popped back to Victorian England to intrude on him? That's on the TTOC complaint list, too."

"Bertie welcomes my visits," Tempo assured him, swinging his big metal feet down and planting them on the plazrug. "Anyway, I have to drop in on him now and then to collect my royalties. A big fan of 19th-century lit like you ought to tag along and —"

"What royalties?"

"Did I not give Bertie Wells the idea for *The Time Machine*?" reminded the robot-type time machine. "15% of his take on a blockbuster like that adds up to a pretty —"

"This is exactly what Sgt. Fiddler is concerned about. We're not supposed to hand out advise and tips to people in the past," said Ken, walking toward his lucite desk. He was a tall, lean man of thirty-three, dark. "Doing stuff like that can futz up the whole fabric of time, causing —"

"Aw, the fabric of time ain't that easy to futz," the time machine assured him. "If those TTOC schmucks would look at the past itself and not worry so much about alleged infringements, they'd see that most of their dippy rules are —"

"What's this complaint about?" Ken was holding a slip of yellow faxpa-

per close to his face. "Buffalo Bill comic books?"

"Hell of an idea. Socko."

"But you can't go dropping in on Street & Smith in 1900 New York City and tell them to publish a Buffalo Bill comic book." Ken sounded far from calm. "Because that would mean the world had comic books something like thirty-five years before they actually started, and the whole future course of —"

"Think of the sales potential." Tempo tapped his fingers on his knees, producing a steel-drum sound. "I had a talented kid named Rudy Dirks lined up to draw the things, too. But the Smith I got in to see lacked the vision to —"

"Wait." Ken's desk had made a low buzzing, a pixphone screen came rising up out of its desktop slot. Scooting around, he dropped into his rubberoid chair. "Yes?"

"Yum . . . it's . . . yum . . . a call for you from TTOC," said the copper-plated secbot out in the Chronic Collectibles, Inc., reception room. "A . . . yum . . . Sgt. Fiddler. She says . . . yum —"

"What are you chewing, Oscar?"

"Yum . . . Black Jack gum, sir."

"And how did you acquire that?"

"Yum . . . I'm not supposed to . . . yum . . . tell."

Nodding at Tempo, Ken inquired, "Did you bring chewing gum back from the 20th century?"

"Heck, they were giving away free samples at the 1939 New York World's Fair, so I —"

"Put on the sergeant," Ken told the secbot, "and get rid of that gum."

"Yum . . . I don't know if I can right away, sir . . . yum . . . because of my metal teeth I find it . . . yum —"

"Put her on."

The gum-chewing robot's image went away, was replaced by that of an attractive but stern-visaged red-haired young woman wearing a two-piece tan unisuit. "I'm surprised to find you around and about, Kenneth," she said.

"Oh, so?"

"You may recall that you declined my invitation to lunch today with the excuse that you and Willis were dining with an important client."

"We are," he lied. "In fact, I was just about to dash for an exit when your —"

"Let me shift from friend to officer, Kenneth," said Sgt. Fiddler of TTOC. "I want to issue you a stern warning."

"Okay, Agnes, go ahead."

"If Tempo gets into any further trouble on this time trip you're making back to Hollywood-1935," said the red-headed Time Travel Overseeing Commission officer, "Lt. Manderson informs me that your accreditation to make these Nonessential Artifacts collection trips will be pulled and —"

"What trip back to 1935 Hollywood?" He frowned from the phone screen

to the lounging robot.

Tempo shrugged his broad silver shoulders, making a small thunk sound. "Search me, sahib," he said.

"Willis applied for a permit this very morning," Agnes Fiddler informed him. "It's been approved, *but* you and Tempo both must be on your best behavior or —"

"Agnes, I've been telling him the same thing."

"You may remember, Kenneth, that I warned you at the time that you and Willis first contemplated trading in your orthodox suitcase-model time machine for the more radical Tempo robot model that others — including the noted temporal detective, Sam Brimmer — have experienced many a woe because of them. There's something in their inner workings, some bug, that causes them to go gallivanting back in time on their own to stir up all sorts of mischief while —"

"Nertz," commented the time machine. "What I've got, sister, is a poetic nature and a sensitive soul. Unlike the dimbulb pills who are employed by your —"

"Is that Tempo's brassy voice I hear braying in the background, Kenneth?"

"Nope, it's only an advan flying by outside," he replied, "advertising Sudoweenies."

"Well then, a word to the wise." Agnes smiled thinly and clicked off.

Sighing, Tempo batted his metallic eyelids. "The lass is smitten with you, tuan," he pointed out. "If you were but to play your cards rightly, possibly even slipping her the old salami, TTOC would mayhap quit chewing my —"

"I have to talk with my partner."

A door slid open, revealing a pudgy balding man of forty-six looming on the threshold. It was Willis, wearing a brand-new lemon-yellow two-piece cabsuit. "I've got a surprise for you," he announced.

"No, you don't," said Ken.

"Death makes me uneasy." Ken ignored his tofusteak, stared out the glazwall of his partner's bigger-than-his office.

"You won't see her die." Willis jabbed his plazfork into another neocod croquet and smiled a reassuring smile across his desk. "You'll be long gone, sport, before the waters of the Pacific Ocean close over the lady's shapely form and she sinks forever into —"

"Another thing I'm not fond of is having these briefings and lunch at the same time."

"It's more efficient."

"Diamond Jim Brady," put in Tempo, who was relaxing in a plazrocker and ticking gently back and forth, "feels exactly the same way about —"

"Hush," advised Willis, chewing.

Ken turned his attention to the scatter of printout sheets and faxcopies

spread out next to his plate on his side of the wide desk. "Twenty-six years old," he said slowly. "That's awfully young to die."

"She'd be one hundred and seventy some if she hadn't killed herself," said Tempo. "And who'd hire a sexpot of that —"

"Nobody said sexpot in the 1930s," Willis said, continuing to eat. "You really have to watch the anachronisms, Tempo, when you get back to —"

"Vernacular is an interesting thing and much more flexible than you cake-eaters think," said the time machine. "I was in Baltimore-1928 just last week, cutting up a few touches and having a brew with H. L. Mencken, who agrees with me that —"

"Explain again," Ken requested of his plump partner, "what I have to do once we get back to Hollywood and environs in 1935."

"Okay, our client is the Movietown Boutique chain." Willis wiped his chin with a pylonap. "And I don't have to tell you, sport, that if we snag them as a full-time client, we can triple our annual income. They're paying us \$40,000 for a sheet from Satin Sinclair's bed."

"Meaning those pansies'll sell it to some rich pea-brained client who dotes on Hollywood flotsam for at least \$80,000," observed the time machine. "We ought to eliminate the middle man, sell these dornicks directly to —"

"All you really have to do, Ken," Willis told him, "is journey back to Southern California — California was all one state then — show up in the vicinity of Sat Sinclair's mansion on the evening of Saturday, October 26, 1935. Probably the best thing to do is wait around until the party's over. Then, when she goes out to kill herself, you and Tempo sneak into her —"

"Bodysnatching," observed Ken quietly.

"We don't want her damn body," Willis scowled. "Good thing, too, since nobody knows what happened to that. The lady swam out to sea until she couldn't swim any more, and drowned. Body was never recovered."

"Read him her suicide note again," suggested the time machine. "I bet there wasn't a dry eye in the police department when they found her clothes neatly folded on the beach and then perused that missive."

Ken asked, "We've got an okay to bring back one of her satin sheets?"

"TIOC has determined her sheets don't play a vital part in the course of history from that day on, so there's no problem. We can even take two, sport, if you get the chance."

"Maybe I'd better, to be on the safe side," Ken continued sorting through the background material. "She was pretty. And despite the platinum hair, she looks fairly intelligent. Killed herself over this guy here, though, huh?"

"There's no accounting for taste," remarked Tempo. "Did you ever get a chance to look at Juliet? Dumpy, with a cloudy complexion and a pronounced moustache. Yet Romeo got himself all het up over —"

"Ken," said Willis, watching him uneasily. "I don't like the way you're moping over that portrait of Satin Sinclair."

"Hum?"

"We can't afford to get sentimental in this business," he reminded. "Keep in mind, sport, that the past is . . . well, it's just that." Shoving his plate aside, he reached across to tap one of the faxcopies. "'Blonde Bombshell of movies takes life.' That's history, over and done."

"I know, sure. I've read about Hollywood in the Thirties." Ken sat back in his chair. "Even saw a couple of her films on the vidwall Cultural Artifacts channel."

"Just another bimbo," said Tempo. "No need to get —"

"Bimbo or brilliant savant," cut in Willis. "You're probably not even going to meet her."

"Probably not," agreed Ken.

Tilting his head, Tempo took another look at himself in the rearview mirror. "I wonder if this beard detracts from my overall app—"

"Eyes on the road," suggested Ken from the passenger seat of the automobile. He was wearing a polka-dot clown suit.

Tempo was decked out as a pirate. "The problem I'm concerned with is the fact that," he said, returning his attention to driving their 1934 Plymouth coupe along the foggy coast highway, "the costume beard and eye patch obscure my underlying disguise. I applied sinflesh to my usually glittering countenance, stuck a wavy-haired rug on my dome to —"

"You could've stayed at our hotel in Santa Monica."

"Hoovey," said the robot. "Anyway, you need me to crash Satin Sinclair's Halloween bash."

"I've crashed parties all across the centuries without any help from —"

"Hollywood parties are different, chum." Tempo drummed his gloved fingers on the steering wheel. "And I've got to tell you that we ain't going to make much of an impression driving up in this wreck. If you'd allowed me to rent the Rolls that —"

"Budget."

"A quick side trip to one of the gambling hells that flourishes hereabouts, and I could double the paltry handful of 20th-century greenbacks that skinflint Willis doled out to us for this —"

"There's her mansion up ahead on the left. Behind that stone wall at the edge of the sea."

"I'm terribly chagrined at tooling up in a jalopy like —"

"Just concentrate on getting us into this festivity."

The redwood and glass mansion was glowing with light, and a wide sandy field to its left was already filling up with sparkling, expensive automobiles. All of them far superior to the car Ken had rented for the evening. Two husky suntanned young men in bell-bottom trousers and white pullovers were parking the vehicles.

"Invitation," requested the blond youth who turned the beam of his flash-

light in on Tempo.

"Surely you aren't asking Scandinavia's leading cinema idol — none other than Lars Darian — to show a vulgar ducat in order to —"

"Nobody gets in without an invite, Lars."

Tempo sighed, brushed at his wavy blond hair, and then reached inside his pirate tunic. "Here you are, young fellow."

The youth glanced at the rectangle of pasteboard. "Okay, Lars. You and your pal disembark, and I'll park this heap."

"See?" whispered Tempo as they walked from the car to the brightly lit mansion. "Even muscle-bound louts recognize our transportation as inferior to —"

"Where'd you get that invitation?"

"Printed it this afternoon whilst you were poring over movie fan magazines in our humble suite." Tempo whacked his chest with a gloved fist. "You forget that I have, in addition to my highly sophisticated and compact time-traveling gear, a small printing press built into me. As well as sundry other gadgets for —"

"This hefty gent at the door wants to see the invitation, too."

Flashing a broad smile, Tempo handed the wide man in the tight tuxedo his spurious invitation to tonight's costume party. "Has anyone asked after Lars Darian, my man?"

"Huh?"

The robot pointed his thumb at his chest. "I happen to be Lars Darian, brought over from my native Scandinavia by Goldwyn to star in the Ty-Gor the Jungle Man motion pictures."

"Ain't that something." The big man pocketed the invitation and stepped aside.

"You're sure," asked Ken, "the real Lars Darian isn't likely to —"

"There is no real Lars Darian. I cooked him up just for tonight."

"Somebody might tumble to the —"

"This is Hollywood, my boy. The phony capital of the world." Tempo adjusted his eye patch and glanced around. "I don't know why you're being so fastidious about my behavior. Here you are, hitting the Satin Sinclair menage hours before you're actually supposed to, so —"

"I'd just rather swipe the sheets now." Ken moved toward the crowded sunken living room. "It makes me uneasy to come around here too close to the time when she —"

"Ah, there's Chester Morris over yonder," said Tempo, grinning. "Hiya, Chet. And Evelyn Venable in the hula skirt. Hiya, Evie."

Ken said in a low voice, "I'll wander upstairs in a while, grab a sheet or two, and we'll take our leave. Don't get yourself entangled with —"

"That's odd."

"What?"

"The lean-moustached gent before the fireplace — wearing the baggy

Robin Hood outfit — happens to be Edmund Lofton."

Ken looked in that direction. "Satin Sinclair's estranged husband, yeah."

"Most accounts of her demise say he only arrived much later, shortly before the party broke up at about 4 A.M. tomorrow. She begged him to take her back, but he refused. Heartbroken, she penned the famous good-bye note and —"

"It's not important."

Tempo tugged at his piratical beard. "Maybe it is, though," he said thoughtfully. "Imagine her doing the Dutch over a simp like that. As I was telling Dante when he waxed enthusiastic over Beatrice, never let —"

"Circulate," advised Ken. "I'll mingle, too, for a while before I head upstairs to . . ."

"Something?"

"Nope, it's only that I noticed Satin Sinclair. Over by the terrace windows. In that Victorian costume."

"That's Walter Abel just behind her, got up as Disraeli," commented the robot. "I'll have to mention to Diz next time I drop in on him that —"

"No, you won't. TTOC frowns on your —"

"TTOC would also frown on our crashing this shindig, maestro."

Ken said, "I know, but I feel better about taking the stuff now. I really don't want to be around here too close to the actual time when she —"

"Say, there's Lotta Lewbers."

"Who?"

"You ain't going to get anywhere in 1935 Hollywood if you aren't aware of the most powerful gossip columnist on the face of the earth," Tempo informed him. "Makes a rather ample harem girl, doesn't she? Yoo hoo, Lotta." Waving, grinning, he made his way through the costumes toward the plump newspaper columnist.

Ken accepted a highball from a tray being circulated by an Oriental houseboy. Holding his glass close to his polka-dot chest, he edged across the big room. He bumped into Charles Laughton, who was in a Caesar costume, dodged a lady in a South Seas princess sarong, nearly stepped on the foot of a man who might have been George Raft wearing a shaggy Daniel Boone getup.

He halted close to the group that was circling Satin Sinclair.

"No, I'm Mrs. Gaskell," the actress was explaining. Her voice was softer, much gentler than the one she used in the ancient movies he'd seen.

"Who the hell," inquired a thick-set man in Roman gladiator guise, "is Mrs. Haskell?"

"Gaskell," corrected Ben Hecht, who was either not in costume or tricked out as a typical Hollywood scriptwriter — tweedy sportscoat, bright yellow polo shirt, slacks. "The Victorian lady who penned *Mary Barton*, *North and South*, and *Cranford*."

"Geeze," said a redhead in a figleaf costume.

Ken found himself joining the group and asking Satin, "Have your read *Wives and Daughters*?"

"Oh, yes," she answered, turning to him. "Actually, though, it's not my favorite. Fact is, I think I like her biography of Charlotte Brontë better than any of her novels."

"Baloney," remarked Hecht. "That's a maudlin piece of tripe that —"

"No, I agree," put in Ken. "There's a feeling to that book that —"

"Hsst!" Someone was prodding him in the back.

Ken turned to see Tempo, hunched over some. "What?"

"Don't gape," advised the robot. "Just casually turn your gaze to the entryway. The Royal Canadian Mountie who's flashing her invite to the bouncer. 'Tis Sgt. Agnes Fiddler."

He glanced. "It is, yep."

"So slit upstairs and do what has to be done," whispered the time machine. "Then we'll hightail it out into the mist ere she spots us and reads us the riot act about mingling with all these figures from the past."

"Guess I'd better, except . . ."

"Except what, marse?"

Ken shook his head. "Nothing, forget it." He turned to the platinum-haired actress. "Excuse me, Miss Sinclair. We'll continue our conversation later."

"I hope so." She smiled at him.

Sneaking across the room for the stairs, he noticed he was having some difficulty breathing. Time travel didn't usually cause him chest pains.

The actress's enormous white bedroom was empty. The bottom drawer of the white bureau was filled with neatly folded satin sheets, some white and some lavender. Ken took one of each, thrust them inside his already padded clown suit.

From the high, wide bedroom window he could see the estate grounds and the beach beyond. The calm dark ocean was streaked with thin fog. "Imagine killing yourself," Ken said as he headed for the white door to the corridor, "over a guy like Loftin. That dinky moustache of his is enough to scare —"

The white doornob was starting to turn.

Spinning on one heel, he ran to the nearest closet and dived inside.

He found himself amidst dozens of hanging evening gowns.

"All right, what?" came Satin's voice. "I really don't have that much time for a private conversation with —"

"You know damn well what. I have got to have that \$30,000."

"Eddie, that's impossible."

She must be out there with her husband. Ken ran his tongue over his lower lip. He really didn't want to hear this. Satin was going to plead with him to take her back, but he'd refuse. She'd threaten suicide.

"... they're going to kill me," the director was saying. "Dump me in one of the canyons above Hollywood with a slug in my brain, love."

"That's no way to get their money. They want you alive and earning."

"Satin, I'm not kidding. With a gambler like Giacomo Macri you don't fool around. I've owed the guy the thirty grand for far too long, and now he says —"

"We separated, Eddie. Just so I wouldn't have to pay any more of your bills for you."

"Legally, you're still my wife."

"I'm working on changing that."

"Look, I know what Fox is paying you for *Blonde Fireball*, love. Hell, you won't even miss a sum like —"

"No, absolutely not. I made up my mind not to finance you anymore."

A door opened, shut.

Letting out his breath, Ken started to open the closet door wider.

"Is Jack there?"

Loften hadn't left the bedroom.

Ken remained among the frocks.

"Listen, Jack," the director was saying into the white telephone. "She's being stubborn and won't . . . I know, okay. Yes, I appreciate that. You just go ahead with the original plan we worked out. And have your boys watch the front and back of her place here in case she tries to leave. Satin's wearing a Mrs. Gaskell costume and . . . Mrs. Gaskell, a Victorian novelist. Hell, Jack, they've seen Satin in the damn movies, haven't they? Tell them to grab the first platinum blonde who's dressed like somebody out of Dickens. Okay, and I've got the fake note ready to leave on the beach. Just make sure they dump her far enough out so that she can't swim back. Soon as this damn party is over, they can come in and take her. What? No, it doesn't bother me. I gave her a chance to help out, and she turned me down. The only way I can get the dough now is to inherit it. Fine with me. Jack, thanks again for helping out on this. Bye."

The phone was hung up.

"Bitch asked for it," muttered Lofton as he left.

Ken realized his mouth was hanging open and that he was breathing in short, panting breaths. "She's not going to kill herself," he said. "They're going to murder Satin and make it look like a suicide." He stepped free of the closet. "But that just isn't right."

He stood to the right of Victor McLaglen, who was in the costume of a Prussian general, and signaled to Tempo.

The time machine was on a wide divan with Lupe Velez on his left knee. Grinning suavely, he excused himself, deposited the actress on a cushion, and came trotting over. "Gad, I could conquer this whole town if I but put my mind to —"

"Where's Agnes Fiddler?"

The robot jerked a gloved thumb toward the terrace. "I introduced the sergeant to a lecherous stuntman, and he in turn lured her out into the misty, romantic evening," he explained. "You appear, bwana, to be a mite distraught."

Ken was anxiously scanning the costumed crowd. "Have you seen Satin?"

"The lass drifted through a few moments ago."

"History is all wrong about this, Tempo." With the time machine leaning close, Ken explained what he'd just overheard upstairs.

When he concluded, Tempo said, "So?"

"They're going to kill her. Murder her and make it seem as though she —"

"Wrong tense. They did kill her. This is the past."

"I didn't mind — well, I did, but I tried to ignore it — standing by and watching a suicide. But, damn it, I am not going to be a witness to a murder."

"Sheets?"

"Hum?"

"Our goal, the object of this particular temporal jaunt. You glommed them?"

Absently, Ken tapped his middle. "Two of them, sure. The point is, this ne'er-do-well husband of hers is planning to —"

"What are you leading up to?"

"I'm going to stop them."

Making a low chuckling sound, Tempo dropped his hand on Ken's shoulder. "Zounds, do I hear rightly? Can this be old Ken 'By-The-Book' Boothby I see before me — the very chap who was earlier criticizing me for some paltry little temporal infraction?" he asked, eyebrows raising. "And now you tell me you're contemplating a chronic change that would —"

"No, it won't. Satin's no more important to the course of the future than her sheets are."

The robot stroked his disguised chin. "You're right at that. The lady's body was never found," he said. "It might play some part in the ecology of marine life of the Pacific Ocean, but as far as the progress of mankind from this day to our own — nada. Long as she leaves this era no later than mañana at dawn, no harm'll be done."

"Right, exactly. All I have to do is get her clear of here before the hoodlums make any moves."

"Whence are you going to take her?"

"Back to our hotel."

"And then?"

Ken blinked. "That's right — well, she'll have to come to our time with us."

"Going to be mighty tricky persuading the lass to buy that."

"Not if I explain the whole situation to —"

"That'll mean violating several more of the basic rules of TTOC. Not to mention myriads of minor regulations and —"

"Can't be helped," Ken told the time machine. "I'll go find her, explain things, and sneak her away. You have to stall Agnes, then meet us back at the hotel in Santa Monica. We'll have to depart no later than sun up. That way we —"

His right arm was suddenly, and firmly, grasped.

"I'm disappointed, Kenneth."

"Evening, Agnes. Your gold braid is all askew."

"Yes, thanks to that beast Tempo unleashed on me."

"Where is the lad?" Tempo inclined his head toward the fog-bound terrace.

"Flat on his back next to the sundial," replied the TTOC sergeant. "Now then, Kenneth, what exactly are you doing here?"

"Making a routine survey of the place. You know we have all the required permits for such a —"

"But you promised me you'd be as unobtrusive as possible. Yet when I arrive back here in 1935 to check up, why I find you frolicking in clownish garb while Tempo fondles —"

"You know me well enough, Agnes, to realize I can be trusted not to futz up the past," he told her as Tempo slipped away.

"Yet there's no need for you to intrude here at all," the red-haired officer told him. "You and that brash mechanism need only drop in tomorrow morning after the poor woman —"

"But that way we don't have a chance to soak up all this local color, to experience the grandeur of bygone days, to wallow in the —"

"You really are commencing to sound an awful lot like Tempo." She scowled, surveying the room. "Where'd he sneak off to?"

"Here he comes."

The time machine had the plump Lotta Lewbers in tow. "I assure you, Lotta darling, she's dying to gab with you."

"My dear," said the gossip columnist, taking hold of Sgt. Fiddler's hand. "Lars tells me that you and he are quite an item. And that you followed him over here from your native Scandinavia, sacrificing a successful motion picture career in your native land. The romance angle is wonderful. You must tell me all about it."

"I think, madam, there's been some mistake."

"Come on, Helga," urged Tempo, "don't be coy. You can confide in Lotta, the lady is like a mom to me." He gave Ken a nudge. "Attend to business, squire."

"See you in a while."

"Dawn."

"Are there wedding bells in the offing?" inquired Lotta.

Satin sat very stiff and straight in the leather armchair. There was a small fire burning in the deep stone library fireplace. "If this is a hoax," she said quietly, "it's darn elaborate."

"It isn't," Ken assured her, reaching again inside his clown costume. "Here's some more reference material I brought along from . . . from my own time." He moved away from the wide, draped window and stepped closer.

The slim blonde actress took the faxcopies he passed her. There were already several scattered across her lap. "Well, this is a nice obit Lotta Lewbers gives me. I didn't think the old dear cared. Louella, however, manages to be snide even through her tears and . . . What the heck is this?"

"Copy of your suicide note. We got a copy from the Motion Picture Academy East's major computer before —"

"Computer?"

"Mechanical brain, stores all sorts of stuff."

She frowned at the copy of the note, puzzled. "But I never wrote this."

"It's a fake, a forgery."

"I see, arranged by Eddie."

He nodded. "All of this must be difficult for you, considering how fond you were of —"

"Hey, I loathe the man. My first and only husband, and he —"

"Oops, that's right. The stories about your killing yourself for love are phony."

Satin leaned toward him. "Isn't there some way we can go to the police? I know most of the local —"

"You can't, Satin." He shook his head. "See, TTOC can't allow that. The way time works . . . well, we can come back and take artifacts and such. But we can't make any big changes, or the whole future might go flooey. There's no telling how much damage it'd do."

"You're saying that I have to die tomorrow morning or the whole course of history goes on the fritz?"

"No, you don't have to die. That's why I'm telling you all this," he said. "But you can't remain in 1935."

She smiled faintly up at him. "It's the only year I've got, Ken."

"We can take you anywhere."

"We?"

"My time machine and I — I don't think you've met him yet." He walked in the direction of the window. "It'll be a major infringement of the law governing time travel, but I'm not worried about that."

"Yes, but oughtn't you to consider your own —"

"Nope, I like you. Not too many women around who are up on Victorian literature either, so —"

"You mean I'm going to have to go . . . I'll have to leave this century?"

"Yep."

"What's the future. . . ? Oh, but I guess it isn't the future to you. Anyway, what's it like?"

"The air quality isn't as good, and there's a lot more urban congestion. Health care, however, is better," he told her. "Thing is, you don't have to stay there. You can live all over the past."

"And then I wouldn't see you?"

He said, "You'll see as much of me as you want."

Satin left her chair, crossed to a large oil portrait of her hanging on the wall. In the painting she was lounging in an ornate carved wooden chair, wearing a shimmering satin dress. "Nobody knows about this safe," she said, swinging the portrait out on its hinges. "Mightn't I take some things along, to cover my expenses? I don't know what it costs to live in the next century."

"More than now," he said. "Sure, you can bring small items."

"Are diamonds and rubies still of value in 2084?"

"They are, yep."

She worked the combination, opened the small wall safe. From within she removed a small black jewel case. "All right, I guess I'm ready." Closing the safe, she swung the portrait back to its original position. "In a way, this is like dying, isn't it? As far as my career is concerned, and everyone I know."

He spread his hands wide. "It's the best I can do."

"Yes, I know."

Ken's right shoulder hunched all at once, a frown touched his forehead. Turning, he eased the drapes an inch open. "Damn, a low black roadster just slid up and parked across the road," he announced. "Four sturdy guys are piling out. Either they're coming to your Halloween party as a gang of thugs or this is a real gang of thugs."

Satin hurried to his side, squinted out at the foggy night. "Those are authentic hoodlums, Giacomo Macri's boys," she said. "At least the one with the moustache is. He used to drop in on Eddie to collect gambling debts. Not a nice guy at all."

"Your erstwhile husband told them what you're wearing, so we'll need a couple of new costumes."

"Where are we going to get those?"

He reached yet again into his clown suit. "I have just the thing," he told her.

They were still about five hundred feet from the misty parking area, when a gruff voice behind them rasped out, "Just a minute, youse."

Adjusting the lavender sheet she was wearing ghost-fashion, Satin murmured, "Darn, I thought we made pretty convincing spooks."

"Stay calm." Turning slowly, Ken peered back through the jagged eye-holes in his white satin sheet.

One of Giacomo Macri's men was leaning against a palm tree some hundred feet away. His right hand was sliding into the jacket of his too-tight tuxedo. "I know youse," he said, beckoning with his meaty left hand.

Watching the glitter of the three jeweled rings on that hand get swallowed by the growing fog, Ken patted his chest. "You know me?"

"Yeah, youse, buddy. I don't mean that bowlegged jane with youse."

After touching Satin's arm, Ken started walking in the thug's direction. "Actually, sir, I don't think we've ever met."

Scowling, the big man nodded. "Geeze, here you go high-hatting me again — just like you done the other night at the Grove," he complained, right fist closing over the gun nesting in his holster. "Me, a fan of yours, too."

"You've got me mixed up with —"

"Naw, you're Stu Erwin, the movie actor. I can tell by that sort of nancy walk you got. Alls I wanted the other night, buddy, was your goddamn autograph, but youse —"

"Gee, I'm sorry. If you have a pen and paper, I'll dash off one now."

The thug eyed him as Ken got closer. "You better strip off that bedsheet first, pal," he suggested, starting to draw out the gun. "Just so I can be absolutely sure I got the right gink this —"

"Hey, listen," confided Ken, leaning closer to the thug. "The little lady I'm with isn't exactly . . . well, she's not the missus. If I come out from under the sheet, busybodies like Lotta Lewbers might spot me and —"

"I get you," the big hoodlum chuckled. "I'll go along with that, Stu." His right hand came out empty, started to pat his pockets. "Here's a stub of a pencil . . . and a match book. You can sign that."

"Gladly. Here."

"Thanks, Stu," said the big man, admiring the scrawled signature Ken had produced. "But youse ought to go easy on the booze, your hand's awful shaky."

Very carefully, Ken returned to where he'd left Satin. He remembered to start breathing again.

"Not a bad performance," she remarked, taking his arm as they continued their escape.

Ken paced once more around the living room of the hotel suite, dressed now in an authentic 1930s double-breasted blue suit. The new day was starting, and the ocean outside was turning a pale, clear blue. "Tempo should've been here by now," he told Satin.

She consulted her wristwatch. "I'm not an expert on time travel, but I assume you can't do it without him."

"We have to have Tempo." He jingled the keys to the rented Plymouth. "I have to go back. You stay here."

"Shouldn't I tag along?"

"If Macri's bunch grabbed my time machine, they may grab you, too."

"Or you."

"Nope, I intend to outfox them again." He ran to the door.

The coast highway was awakening. A lean man in a white suit was unfurling the awning in front of a juice stand that was shaped like a gigantic orange, and a fat lady in a mink coat was walking a frisky spaniel along the sand. Produce trucks were groaning and puffing along, and seagulls were scouring the shore.

Ken drove as fast as he could, trying to remember what the speed limit was in this part of the century. He didn't want to get stopped by a highway cop.

All the cars were gone from the field next to Satin's mansion. A scarlet domino mask lay in the weeds next to where he parked. As he hurried toward the house, he noticed a pair of frilly peach-colored panties dangling from a prickly bush.

The big house was cold and chill, deserted.

Ken double-timed down a twisting wooden staircase to the beach. A hundred yards away he saw a neat pile of clothes.

When he reached it, he saw that there was a note, too, weighted down with an abalone seashell.

"Who are they killing, if I have Satin at the hotel?"

All at once a scatter of offshore gulls began squawking. They circled the water, then rose up and away.

Something was churning up foam about a quarter-mile out.

It was someone swimming this way, using a violent dog paddle. Someone with long platinum blonde hair.

"Nice of you to get up a welcoming committee, chief?"

"Tempo?"

The robot emerged from the surf, dripping profusely. "Note that I was forced to don drag to help the cause." He was clad in a white satin dressing gown.

"What'd you do, impersonate Satin?"

"After you two fled, it occurred to me that unless a note were found on the shore and so forth, there might well be a glitch in time," he explained. "Therefore, I got myself up to resemble the lady and waited in her boudoir. The goons were too dense to tumble onto my subterfuges until their motor launch was well out upon the bounding main."

"Where are they now?"

"Full fathom five or thereabouts," Tempo continued, wringing out his skirt. "Unless they managed to survive after I drilled a handsome hole in the bottom of their craft with my built-in lazgun."

"Hey, you're not supposed to assassinate thugs. That could botch up the past just as badly as Satin's not —"

"Nix, nobody misses supernumeraries, my boy," Tempo assured him.

"Now what say we shake the dust of 1935 from our coattails? Sgt. Fiddler won't remain tied up in that trailer forever."

"You tied her up and dumped her in a trailer?"

"Not I, nay. That stuntman did, after I helpfully informed him that bondage was the key to her heart. Where's our actress, by the way?"

"Safe, back at the —"

"What are you saps hanging around here for?"

Coming down the wooden steps toward them was Edmund Lofton, in golf tweeds now.

"Ah, the grieving hubby," remarked Tempo.

Smiling quietly, Ken said, "Good day, Eddie."

"I'm supposed to be the one who finds her stuff and the note," said the director, angry. "Didn't Jack Macri explain that you had to get the hell away from here as soon as —"

"We're not from Macri," said Ken amiable. "Actually, we're from the future."

"We just saved Satin's life," added Tempo, deciding to doff his wig.

"But don't fret," said Ken. "Nobody'll ever know, and you'll be able to inherit her money, anyway."

"Won't do you that much good," said the time machine. "You get killed in your newest sports car in May of 1937."

The moustached director glared from one to the other. "What kind of rib is this?"

"Nothing you can ever tell anybody about," explained Ken. "If you did, they'd think you were goofy. And now, here's something else for you."

Ken stepped forward, swung, and delivered an impressive jab to Lofton's chin.

After making a strangled clicking noise, the director fell over and sprawled next to the pile of Satin's garments.

"More rules broken," said Ken, starting for the stairs.

"You know, bwana, you're finally starting to understand what time travel is all about," said Tempo approvingly as he followed him.

Afternoon sunlight was coming in through the stained-glass windows of the cottage parlor.

Satin stepped in from the yard, announcing, "There seems to be a clergyman in a dogcart calling on us."

Ken came to the open doorway and looked out across the flower-filled yard. "That's Tempo under those muttonchop whiskers."

The time machine tethered his horse to a lilac bush and came bounding over to them. "Bless you, my children," he intoned.

"Overdone," mentioned Ken.

"You can't overdo piety in England in 1890," he assured them. "Particularly in this remote part of Sussex. How goes the vacation?"

"Splendid," said Ken.

"I agree," said Satin. "And how are things in 2084? I still haven't seen much of it."

"Sgt. Fiddler has dropped most of her charges against Ken and myself," the robot replied. "And nobody knows that we spirited you away."

Ken settled onto the ancient bench beside the doorway. "Why's she dropping the charges?"

"My eyewitness account of her lewd behavior in 1935 caused TTOC to reprimand the lady, and to suspect that her accusations were made out of spite."

"Is Willis doing okay?"

"As well as can be expected. He's anxious for your return."

"I still have a full month of vacation coming," Ken said as the young woman sat beside him. "What about Movietown — have they paid for the sheets?"

The robot removed his broad-brimmed clerical hat. "They balked initially because they'd discovered that both the artifacts had eyeholes cut in them," he said. "Not wishing to mention what uses you'd put the sheets to, I merely informed them that Satin Sinclair was a very eccentric actress, given to such things. They bought my story, and all is well." ●

THE LITERARY CAREER OF RON GOULART

Current Directions . . .

I recently celebrated — celebrated alone, since nobody else took any notice — my 35th year of writing science fiction. My first sale was made in 1952, when I was an innocent, bright-eyed college sophomore. At about the same time the dean of students was striving to have me tossed out of the University of California at Berkeley, but that was mostly because of my un-American activities while editing the college humor magazine.

My mentor in the SF field was Anthony Boucher, who also lived in Berkeley and was then editing *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*. I took a short-story class he was teaching out of his home, and sold my earliest stuff to his magazine. Philip K. Dick always claimed to be a student of the same class, but I never encountered him there. He was usually working at a record store and would send his stories over with his wife. I did meet him at the record store, when I dropped in to buy jazz records. We had no influence whatsoever on each other's work, although he did once write out for me his formula for constructing a science-fiction novel.

After graduating from college — the dean hadn't succeeded in dumping me — I went to work as a copywriter in a San Francisco advertising agency. I was noted for my humorous copy about such staples as peanut butter, beer, and breakfast food. I behaved in the best boy-genius manner and even wore

a gray flannel Brooks Brothers suit. Periodically I escaped from the ad game and free-lanced, selling in the SF and mystery short-story fields. I hid out in Southern California in the late 1950s, hanging out with such fellow boy wonders as Harlan Ellison and William F. Nolan.

I got married in 1964, and this apparently had a profound effect on me and my work. It inspired me to try longer, more ambitious, and somewhat better paying, works. My first novel, *The Sword Swallower*, was written in 1967 and published by Doubleday in 1968. Although the short story remains my favorite format, I've since turned out over fifty novels in the science-fiction category. Plus quite a few mysteries and Westerns.

The past few years I've been cashing in on my lifelong interest in cartooning and comics by writing about newspaper strips and comic books. I've even allowed myself to be persuaded to edit an encyclopedia devoted to American comics. Another of my interests is old movies and the Hollywood of fifty and more years ago. *Skyrocket Steele*, an SF novel set in 1941 Hollywood, has been optioned by some people who think they can turn it into a motion picture. Meanwhile, I continue to make occasional trips into vanished Hollywood. "Satin" was one result of such an excursion.

... and Past Achievements

Science Fiction:

Hellquad. DAW, 1984.

The Prisoner of Blackwood Castle. Avon, 1985.

Suicide, Inc. Berkley, 1985.

Brainz, Inc. DAW, 1985.

The Curse of the Obelisk. Avon, 1987.

Daredevils, Ltd. St. Martin's Press, 1987.

Starpirate's Brain. St Martin's Press, 1987.

Everybody Comes to Cosmo's. St. Martin's Press, 1988.

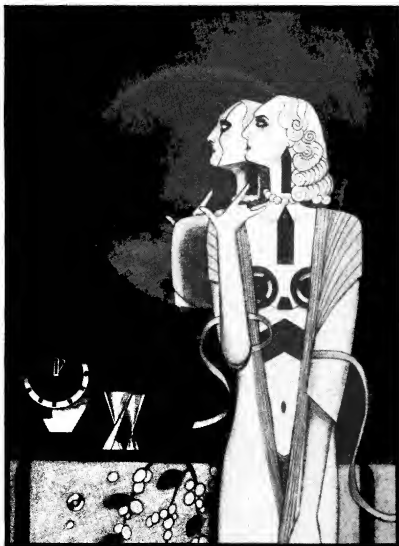
Mystery:

A Graveyard of My Own. Walker, 1985.

Nonfiction:

The Great Comic Book Artists. St. Martin's Press, 1986.

Ron Goulart's Great History of Comic Books. Contemporary, 1986.



Inflections

The Readers

Dear Mr. Price:

I very much enjoyed Kristine Kathryn Rusch's article on *Clarion* in the November 1987 issue, although I was rather surprised to see my comments mentioned in the article, since I do not recall (as Ollie North might say) having a direct conversation with Ms. Rusch about *Clarion*. I do remember making a few remarks in response to a panel discussion on writing workshops at the Seattle Alternacon in March 1987, so I trust Ms. Rusch noted my words then. (*That* will teach me to shoot my mouth off at conventions.) Given the circumstances, it's understandable that Ms. Rusch slightly misunderstood what I said. May I make a few corrections?

Alan Brennert was *not* a student at my workshop, the 1975 *Clarion* workshop at Justin Morrill College/ Michigan State University. Brennert did *visit* the workshop for a weekend in 1975, but he wasn't officially enrolled that year (he did attend earlier, I believe in 1974; check with him). In addition to Kim Stanley Robinson, writers who did attend the 1975 workshop and who have since published novels include Michael Berlyn (*The Integrated Man*, *Blight*), Robert Crais (*The Monkey's Overcoat*), and Gregory Frost (*Lyrec*, *Tain*).

I may have implied that I felt I could not compete with Kim Stanley Robinson in 1975, but what I think I said was that I felt intimidated by his writing abilities. What is important to emphasize about *Clarion* is that there

is a range of talent attending the workshop, but this is not to say that all the writers are at the same stage in the growth or development of their talent. Some, like Stan, were obviously further along. Although age is not necessarily an indicator of talent, it is often the case that older writers (or, writers who have been writing for a longer time) have developed their craft more. There's probably a "steam engine time"* for writers, too: when a writer is ready to burst out onto the literary scene and be noticed, then that writer will be noticed. Alas, sometimes this does not happen soon enough for some writers (and often it happens after they are dead).

At the time I thought that Stan was a better writer than I was; what I know now is that he had worked harder at his craft, and thus had achieved a measurable success (i.e., Damon Knight and Kate Wilhelm bought stories from him) that I had not then achieved. No big deal. I no longer feel intimidated by another writer's abilities because I know that what makes a writer "good" or "better" is impossible to articulate. Writers do not compete with each other; they compete with themselves. Once a writer gains some confidence in his or her ability (and that's part of the lesson *Clarion* teaches), a writer comes to realize that comparisons to other writers are invalid and fruitless. I still respect Kim Stanley Robinson's writing, but he does not intimidate me, nor do I feel I have to "compete" with

him. I mention all this because I don't want Stan to think that by being a wonderful writer in 1975, he did irreparable harm to his fellow students. He didn't, and in fact, he was and is a wonderful human being. If anything, his early success — and his humility upon achieving it — was an inspiration, although I now and then forget about the humility part.

Anyway, I enjoyed Ms. Rusch's article. While it's no big deal, would you politely suggest to her that if she is going to quote comments made at a public gathering (no harm there; public words are fair game), it might be a good idea to contact the speakers and double-check their comments? I would have been happy to elaborate on my comments if she had asked.

Best,
Michael Armstrong
15032 Snowshoe Lake
Anchorage AK 99516

* "Steam engine time" is a concept suggested by Charles Fort, i.e., when it's time for the steam engine to be invented, then the steam engine will be invented.

We thank you, Michael, for your letter. We did, however, pass it along to Kristine Rusch so that we could get her comments about the issues raised.

— Patrick Lucien Price

Dear Mr. Armstrong:

Thank you for the kind words on my Clarion article. I am sorry that you don't remember our two conversations at Alternacon last March. I did speak to you directly, first at the autograph party (I was sitting to the left of Dean Wesley Smith — in other words, I'm the person the *Locus* photographer cut out of the picture the magazine ran in its Alternacon coverage) on Friday

evening. That night, I told you that I was doing an article on Clarion and found out that you had attended. We chatted a bit, nothing important, since I wasn't in "interview mode" at the time. The next night, however, I talked with you for some time in the Writers of the Future suite. I made it very clear that I was writing an article on Clarion for *Amazing Stories*, and I asked you for an interview "either now or later." You said, "Now is fine." So we talked. I never attended any of your panels. If you want copies of my notes, please write to me directly, and I would be glad to send them to you.

I made a mistake in assuming that Alan Brennert had attended Clarion in 1975 because he had a story in Kate Wilhelm's *Clarion SF*. That anthology had many stories from current Clarion students, and I figured that Brennert was one of them. Upon rereading the introduction to his story, I find that, by putting Kate's comments together, he had attended an earlier workshop. One of the major problems with Clarion is that no one keeps a list of attendees. Michigan State has a list for the past two or three years. The archives have stories by many Clarion students, although not all. The names from the earlier years have, for the most part, disappeared. It would take a lot of detective work — something I did not have the time to do — to find the names of everyone who attended Clarion.

Finally, I agree that students of many levels attend Clarion. The levels are not just levels of talent, but also levels of drive and persistence. Some of Clarion's most talented writers have never had a word published, although many of its most persistent have. Success in this business has less to do with the "steam engine effect" (although I believe it's a factor) than

with the writer's own internal drive. There are a lot of talented writers out there, but only a handful (a large handful, but a handful nonetheless) who send their stories out to editors.

Sincerely,
Kristine Kathryn Rusch
1332 Lawrence, #3
Eugene OR 97401

Dear Mr. Price:

I had to write in response to Orson Scott Card's essay "Adolescence and Adulthood in Science Fiction" (November 1987). I found it to be not only perceptive, insightful, and astute, but also functional categorically in both the creative and literary sense.

The only objections I could make are merely a couple of points of understatement and omission, feeble sins at best, which may simply have been manifestations of constraints upon the length of the essay.

Mr. Card's assessment of human responsibility in his divisions of "child," "adolescent," and "adult" are quite perceptive, acceptable, and workable; but I feel there is yet a fourth category Mr. Card declined to introduce. This is the category of the "s.c." — sometimes called the "senior citizen," sometimes the "second childhood," or as I prefer to think of it, the "self-completed."

The "s.c.," by my humble definition (paralleling Mr. Card's), is simply that individual who has by dint of time, growth, effort, circumstance, or simple fate progressed beyond the "adult" stage where responsibilities — to children and family, to community and career — have been met to that individual's fullest potential, and for whom the proverbial "rat race" is essentially over. This person is afforded, thusly, the luxury of a "second childhood" — the *freedom from respon-*

sibilities of external affairs, duties, and pressures — and given the opportunity, at long last, to indulge in some *responsibilities to self* that may have previously been sacrificed in the face of more broadly encompassing "adult" responsibilities.

This, too, like the other categories Mr. Card identifies, is not dependent upon chronological age, but more upon the individual's mental and moral outlook, the circumstances and structures of the individual's social environment, and that individual's position among them. It can, in those fortunate enough to be called "successful," arrive at sometimes surprisingly early ages chronologically.

I mention this category because Mr. Card's proposition seems so delightfully clear and effective that I thought it should also be *complete*, and because the "s.c." seems to be a category all too often overlooked in literature — certainly in science fiction, an adolescent-oriented genre. Those who neglect this fourth category may be missing some fantastic and wonderful characterizations, for within this group are some of the most unique, free-spirited, and downright delightful members of humanity one could ever hope to meet. It seems such a shame to let them be ignored.

Just a humble observation. Love your magazine!

Respectfully yours,
C. V. Blaine
Eugene OR

Readers, please continue to send us your letters. We'd like to read about your likes and dislikes; this way we can better serve your needs. After all, you are reading this magazine for personal enjoyment. So, write us!

Till next issue.

— Patrick Lucien Price



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Clarion West Announces 1988 Writers' Workshop

The fifth annual Clarion West science-fiction and fantasy writing workshop will be held from 19 June to 31 July 1988 at Seattle Central Community College, with writers-in-residence: **Peter S. Beagle, Greg Bear, Orson Scott Card, Gardner Dozois, Elizabeth Lynn, and Joan Vinge.**

Applications are now being accepted. Approximately 20 students will be selected from the applicants. Tuition until 1 March 1988 is \$925.00. Late applications will be considered until 15 April 1988, at a cost of \$975.00. College credit and dormitory lodging are available, but are not covered by tuition. Limited scholarships are available.

To apply, submit 20 to 30 pages of manuscript (1 or 2 short stories or a novel excerpt with outline) with a cover letter describing your background and reasons for wanting to attend Clarion West, and a \$50.00 refundable deposit payable to Clarion West. Write to: Clarion West, 340 15th Avenue East, Suite 350, Seattle WA 98112.

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